

LEEDS CITY COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Held on

Wednesday 21st June 2006

At

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
CIVIC HALL, LEEDS

In the Chair:

THE LORD MAYOR
(Councillor Mohammed Iqbal)

VERBATIM REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

Transcribed from the notes of
J L Harpham Ltd.,
Official Court Reporters and Tape Transcribers,
Queen's Buildings, 55, Queen Street,
Sheffield, S1 2DX

VERBATIM REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF LEEDS CITY COUNCIL
MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 21st JUNE 2006

THE LORD MAYOR: Members of the Council, members of the public in the gallery – I can see some friends there – good afternoon. Shall we start today's Council meeting with switching mobile phones off? If you leave them on you can contribute to the Lord Mayor's Charity. The first time £5 and then we keep doubling it and we will keep recording that.

ITEM 1 – MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING ON 12th MAY AND
ANNUAL MEETING ON 22nd MAY

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Can I move that the Minutes be received?

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: Second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I call for the vote? All agreed?
AGREED.

ITEM 2 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I announce that the list of written declarations, item 2, Declarations of Interest, the list submitted by members is on display in the ante-room, on deposit in public galleries and has been circulated to each member's place in the Chamber.

Can I invite any further individual declarations or corrections to those notified on the list? Councillor Beverley.

COUNCILLOR BEVERLEY: I wish to declare a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 13 as a close relation of mine works at Morley Sports Centre.

COUNCILLOR FOX: My Lord Mayor, I am a member of the School's Organisation Committee, therefore personal and prejudicial interest relating to Item 9.

COUNCILLOR DOWNES : Same declaration.

COUNCILLOR EWENS : Can I declare an interest now I have got older as one of the people they are talking about?

COUNCILLOR HOLLINGSWORTH : Lord Mayor, can I declare an interest as a member of Richmond Hill Elderly Action

COUNCILLOR RAFIQUE: Lord Mayor, I would like to declare a personal interest as an employee of Education Leeds with relation to the reference back and my name to it.

THE LORD MAYOR: Anyone else? Can I now invite members by a show of hands to confirm that they have read the list and the list as amended and agreed its contents insofar as they relate to their own interests. All agreed? AGREED

ITEM 3 – COMMUNICATIONS

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: I have no communications to report, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you.

ITEM 4 - DEPUTATIONS

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Lord Mayor, I can advise members that there will be three deputations rather than the four listed on the order paper and they will be the deputations at 1, 3 and 4. There will not now be a deputation in respect of the Osmondthorpe One Stop situation.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Can I move that all deputations be received?

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: I second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All agreed? (The motion was carried)

(The first deputation entered the Chamber)

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council Meeting. Please now make your speech to Council, which must not be longer than five minutes. Thank you.

MR J DOOLEY: My Lord Mayor, Council, thank you very much indeed for allowing us to make this presentation this afternoon. Our aim is to increase swimming provision in North-West Leeds by developing a site for a pool in Horsforth to serve Horsforth and offer extra choice to the residents in surrounding North-West Leeds areas.

Why would we want this? We feel that the existing pool provision is inadequate for demand. The thriving sporting life in Horsforth, with rugby, cricket, golf etc, would be seriously enhanced by having a pool to allow new swimming, lifesaving, canoeing, water polo and diving clubs to exist.

At present all the Horsforth and Cookridge residents who are wanting to swim seriously need to access distance facilities, inaccessible on foot, generally requiring a car. Bus transport to the nearest pools is difficult for target groups – youngsters, the elderly and the disabled.

We also must consider the primary schools in our area. The schools themselves spend considerable time and money on travel to and from pools some distance from Horsforth. This limits swimming provision. In fact in some cases they spend longer travelling than they do swimming.

Horsforth swimmers, unable to train effectively for reasons of time and distance and other groups including senior citizens with mobility problems and several thousand students from Trinity and All Saints College along with Park Lane college in Horsforth, would benefit from a community pool.

We feel also that this facility would help reduce antisocial behaviour and contribute to the North-West Leeds communities reaching a national target to increase participation in fitness activities by 2% over the year. In fact we would be looking hopefully to meet a target of five times 30 minutes per week for our community.

The feasibility study – what would it identify? Why? Why is there a need for an extra pool in North-West Leeds and how would it meet the needs of the groups who face difficulties in getting to Leeds' other pools?

Where a pool might be constructed, given questions of land ownership, construction costs, access on foot by both public and private transport with a main regard to access by school students. A potential site, I feel, could be at TASC, but that needs to be identified properly.

What are the likely overall costs and sources of funding for a pool? How would ongoing repairs and maintenance be dealt with? Which adult communities would also be able to use the pool and how much help may they provide in operating its organisation?

We have looked at various models and we have looked at the Tadcaster model. Glen Johnson, manager of Tadcaster Community Swimming Pool, co-ordinated the opening of a brand new pool in 1994. He has advised setting up a charity such as the Horsforth Community Swimming Pool Trust, administered by local trustees. There has been a suggestion of myself, being a Horsforth Town Councillor and also the deputy head of Horsforth School, might be an ideal chairperson of that. The trust would expand, however, to safeguard the interests of residents from other parts of North-West Leeds.

It is not the intention for the pool to become an additional burden on Leeds itself but we would feel that if you could give the go-ahead to the finance of the feasibility study, that if Leeds were to benefit generally then it would be some support.

In terms of Horsforth, we give no apologies. We have no apologies for wanting good facilities in Horsforth with the Horsforth identity. Morley and Armley are getting new facilities named after their areas. Morley is not the South-West Leeds Leisure Centre. Horsforth wants equal treatment but realises that the organisation may be different, hence the trust.

In conclusion, really, we ask you if you would to consider funding the feasibility study in conjunction with Horsforth Town Council on the basis that the benefit of a new pool in Horsforth would accrue to the residents throughout the North-West Leeds, offering enhanced choice and improved accessibility.

If I may just say, a quote from Sports England 2000. They did say, the Government stated in April 2000, "Not everyone has the same access to sport. There are marked differences between men and women, between ethnic groups – particularly between different social classes. We would want to reduce over the next ten years the unfairness in access to sports. To achieve this goal we will invest in grass root facilities and make sure that everyone involved in sport makes a concerted effort to give the opportunity to those currently excluded."

Ladies and gentlemen, we would hope that you would consider this and at least enable us to go forward with a pool in the Horsforth area that would serve a vast amount of North-West Leeds. Thank you very much indeed for your time. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Can I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for consideration?.

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: I second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All in favour?

(The motion was carried)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you very much. Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which will be given to your comments. Good afternoon.

(The first deputation withdrew and the second deputation entered the Chamber)

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please make your speech now to Council, which must not be longer than five minutes.

CHAIRMAN, BOSTON SPAR PARISH COUNCIL: Good afternoon and welcome to the meeting from Boston Spa Parish Council and representatives from Clifford. On my right is Alan Pennington, who is Clerk to Clifford Parish Council and on my left is Barry Ward, who has been a regular user of this bus service that we are going to speak about.

In introducing this document concerning the withdrawal of the 780 bus service from Wetherby to Tadcaster via Boston Spa, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that when people lose a service in rural areas it is far more devastating than when people lose a similar service in an urban area where there are many other alternatives to use.

As chairman of Boston Spa Parish Council I am here to speak about the effects that the withdrawal of the 780 bus service will have on those residents of Boston Spa and those of Clifford and Bramham who have to make journeys to Tadcaster. For anyone who has an absolute necessity to travel to Tadcaster, the alternative route would be to take a bus to Leeds before connecting to the Leeds-York service. Total time taken would be in the region of 70 to 80 minutes. The distance from Boston Spa to Tadcaster is four miles. Then there is the return journey.

One member of this deputation, Mr Barry Ward, on my left, has used the service to Tadcaster to connect up with a service to York for roughly twelve years. He has also recently given up a voluntary job in Tadcaster because the service at the moment is a temporary service, the regular service having been withdrawn without consultation.

I also spoke to a neighbour of mine in Boston Spa who was reliant on the service as he has eyesight problems which prevent him from driving. He did consider buying a cycle but he realised that because of his eyesight problems that might prove to be impossible. He has to visit a health clinic in Tadcaster once a fortnight at various times of the day and week. There are also at least two people I know of who work in Tadcaster and who rely on this service. People with relations and friends in York or Selby can catch a connecting service from Tadcaster and vice versa. This is also the only regular service that services the eastern end of Boston Spa.

We on the Council believe that people in this area who do not have personal transport should have reasonable access to travel services in order that they can enjoy facilities that others enjoy. Furthermore, it is in all our future

interests that, unless we reduce the pollution in our environment, our quality of life will undoubtedly suffer and this can only be achieved by reducing the number of cars and lorries on our roads.

I notice that this Council has resolved that, 'It recognises urgent need for public investment in bus services and support infrastructure.' With this in mind, the Council has instructed its Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Transport to ask that legislation be enacted to allow local bus services to be regulated so as to safeguard that investment. I find this resolution very encouraging as it shows that all the major political parties in this city have the same thinking on the question of subsidising and regulating the bus services.

Thank you for giving us your time to hear our concerns. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for consideration.

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: I second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The motion was carried)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which will be given to your comments. Good afternoon. Thank you.

(The second deputation left the Chamber and the third deputation entered the Chamber)

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to Council today. You have five minutes to make a speech to Council.

REPRESENTATIVE OF ADEL PRIMARY SCHOOL: Good afternoon Lord Mayor, Council members. I will be referring to *this* sheet throughout my presentation. (*Demonstrated*)

We are here as extremely concerned parents of children at Adel Primary School. As I speak there are three classes of children watching as their windows are being bricked over. Just over a year ago a decision was made to demolish internal store cupboards in classrooms and to replace them with solid brick stores outside the classrooms.

There appears to have been a series of unfortunate events leading to the current situation.

Leeds Architectural Design Services were employed to design the scheme. They ignored DfES Guidelines which require daylight to be the prime means of lighting and, unbelievably, came up with a solid brick box you can see in diagram 1.

They produced drawings submitted for planning approval which did not show existing windows in the classrooms, as you can see from diagram 2. The plans were accompanied by a photo which was taken at such an angle that two large windows were obscured, as you can see by number 3.

Leeds City Council Planning Department granted planning permission on the basis of these grossly inaccurate drawings. Planning notices were posted to cul-de-sacs during the school summer holidays so parents were not alerted to the potential impact of the stores on the classrooms. No plans were displayed at school for us to have a look at – not even a letter home describing the detail of the wonderful new stores outside the classrooms so that someone might have picked up on the fact that they would obstruct the existing windows completely. The first we knew about it all was when construction started, as you can see from photograph 4.

Parents immediately raised concerns with the school and were assured that all correct procedures had been followed and that nothing could be done until the governing body met on 12th June.

A petition was drawn up to stop the blocking of daylight from the classrooms and within 36 hours it was signed by some 81 parents. Before the governors could meet, however, costly ad hoc alterations were started deviating from the approved planning permission. These alterations include adding external doors, Velux windows in the room and high level slit windows, as you can see by photograph number 6.

Since the parents had been told right from the beginning that no changes could be made to the approved building work unless there were health and safety issues, it is a mystery how such alterations could have been started before the governors' meeting. We simply do not understand on whose authority this was done and why some changes have been made while other suggestions for improvements have been ignored.

Parents have attempted to get minutes of sub-committee meetings, a formal meeting with parent governors and a parent with professional expertise to be invited to speak at the governors' meeting, but all the requests were ignored or rejected.

After the meeting on 12th June the governors have given no undertaking that the situation will be effectively addressed, merely stating in a letter to all parents that the current building work will be completed and then a costing undertaken for the insertion of a four foot square window underneath the high level one.

What we are left with is woefully inadequate storage because, as you will appreciate, with doors and windows added and the original classroom windows being one whole wall, there is not a huge amount of wall left that can actually be used for shelves. The pupils have virtually no view outside, therefore they are unable to do things like grow plants from seeds on the windowsills, as is part of the National Curriculum. Parents have actually been unable to check that their children are safely in the classroom because they cannot even wave goodbye, they cannot see them at all in years 4 and 5.

This whole fiasco was originally costed at £54,000. Is it good use of public funds?

Our primary concern now is that since the governors' next scheduled meeting is in September, the whole of the summer holidays, when of course this sort of work should ideally be done, will be wasted and even if further changes are eventually agreed to be made, the whole process will drag on and disrupt the children's educational environment for yet another term or so.

We are here to appeal directly to you to work with the school governors, Education Leeds, the planning department and Leeds Architectural Design Services to come up with the funding for a more appropriate solution to the storage problems at Adel Primary School.

Thank you for your attention. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for consideration.

COUNCILLOR MINKIN: Next meeting.

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: I second that, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The motion was carried)

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I thank you for attending the Council Meeting and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which will be given to your comments. Have a good day. Thank you.

(The third deputation left the Chamber)

THE LORD MAYOR: Before we go on to next item I just wanted to welcome somebody. We have some important visitors in our city. As well as members of the public there we have got some civic visitors from a city called Brasov in Romania, what used to be Kronstadt centuries ago, part of Germany. Some members on *this* side and one or two on *this* side might remember centuries ago it used to be called Kronstadt. I cannot remember, long before my time! I would like to welcome them. We have got a continuing relationship with this city which is known as a big student city in Romania and I hope they enjoy their visit here in our city, a wonderful city and I hope the weather stays like this as well, apart from a few drizzles. Thank you. (*Applause*)

ITEM 5 – REPORTS

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I move in terms of the notice.

COUNCILLOR HAMILTON: I second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Leadley to comment.

COUNCILLOR LEADLEY: My Lord Mayor, I wish to comment on two matters covered by Scrutiny in the 2005/6 municipal year.

Firstly, the work of the Flooding Scrutiny Commission, which is outlined on page 20. Although the Commission has come to an end, there is a need to carry its work forward. On 3 May just gone, which was the anniversary of flooding in 2005, I wrote to City Council Land Draining and Highways to remind them that repairs shown to be necessary a year earlier remained undone. Early May this year was unusually dry but rain returned and we had floods again on 16 May and at least one house which had been flooded in 2005 was flooded again for want of work on a highway culvert.

Then there is a need to follow up our request for national legislation to bring about reform of riparian ownership and I have had an encouraging reply from Paul Truswell MP about that.

Secondly, the annual report of Scrutiny Board Thriving Communities, particularly the work programme for 2005/6 which is set out on page 41 and refers to gypsies and travellers. An important part of that work was to do with the provision of permanent and temporary caravan sites. I notice elsewhere that the outgoing Board passed that work forward to the successor, Neighbourhoods and Housing Scrutiny Board to carry on with it in 2006/7. Although they may be less popular than some minorities, gypsies and travellers will not go away, or at least not very far. We will keep on wasting money and bringing nuisance to the rest of our citizens if we do not face up to their need for more pitches for their caravans.

Romany gypsies are our oldest surviving ethnic minority. Their ancestors left north-west India about a thousand years ago and later generations arrived in England in the 16th Century, over 400 years before later arrivals from the sub-continent. What is left of the Romany language in England is closely related to Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu, though I do not propose to upstage Councillor Harrington by demonstrating that today. Thank you, my Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Grahame to comment on Agenda Item 5, Reports.

COUNCILLOR GRAHAME: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. Would the relevant member be able to tell me what they have put in the budget for the cleaning of the gullies? You say there is £7m in the highways and to prevent the flooding that is happening locally on the streets. Am I on the wrong one? I am sorry, it is the wrong one.

THE LORD MAYOR: I am sorry for rushing you in. We will give you a couple of minutes and go on to Councillor Ralph Pryke.

COUNCILLOR PRYKE: Lord Mayor, this is covering three Scrutiny Boards. It is affordable housing, which is under the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board and my own, Thriving Communities and there is also one on Antisocial Behaviour Interventions, which was Councillor Anderson's Board last year.

I would like to commend the finding of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board that affordable family accommodation should be a specific priority for neighbourhoods and housing department. The department and the Board acknowledged the potential tension between the objectives of Every Child Matters and the Community Cohesion Objectives associated with effective action to tackle antisocial behaviour. Affordable housing is very complex and the Council has very little room for manoeuvre. The demand and supply of Council housing, local lettings policies and our own bedroom eligibility rules and so on give us very little scope for doing anything practical for the people of the city.

Also, we have the problems with the very concept of affordability, especially when the Government uses a definition based on local average wages while at the same time boasting of the number of jobs created since 1979, ignoring the fact that most of them are minimum wage or part-time jobs or both, and

the numbers of much better paid jobs lost to the local economy as a result of Government policies impact far greater on Leeds.

Just yesterday the Nationwide Building Society reported that people in their twenties can no longer afford to get on the property ladder. Scope for the Council to help people is very, very limited. For example, only £2.8m has become available for social housing from commuter development sums collected to date in Leeds. Another example – UDP policies H11, 12 and 13 and SPG3 promote affordable housing but only 300 affordable dwellings have been completed since 2001 in Leeds, because developers do not want to make a loss – what a surprise – and the Government will not even let the ALMOs or other social housing providers replace the properties lost to right-to-buy. Rather a bad situation for Leeds.

I would also like to refer to the Environment and Community Safety Board's Antisocial Behaviour Interventions Enquiry – page 48 in the reports; particularly the need to discourage antisocial behaviour and tackle its underlying causes.

The Home Secretary got into hot water a week ago with his call to, "Don't moan, take action, it's your street too." Whether or not it was just another weekend stunt for the tabloids, the Prime Minister soon slapped him down, saying, "We have never encouraged people to be vigilantes", but the problem remains. If public safety is the sole responsibility of agencies of the state, we are expected to remain passive when we witness anything from bullying, mugging, harassment and assault.

That is exactly what happened to one of our Community Safety Co-ordinators in Leopold Street, Chapeltown, earlier this month. You may have read about it in the YEP. Our officer was angry that someone who witnessed the assault and robbery did nothing and a passing driver refused to help her. It is not good enough to shrug and say, "Well, that is Chapeltown, what do you expect?" because it is everywhere, yet people have decided for themselves that if they intervene they risk attack or retribution, like a brick through the window, with no social or legal support.

People should have the responsibility to intervene and this administration wants the Council to help them. People need to use common sense but so do the police and the courts. If that means refusing to charge victims and third parties where their actions are clearly reactive and proportionate, then so be it. I very much hope that our administration will be more supportive of people who take action against antisocial behaviour. Thank you, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Lancaster to make a comment.

COUNCILLOR LANCASTER: Thank you, Lord Mayor. In speaking to the Scrutiny Board Health and Wellbeing report to Council, particularly the childhood obesity enquiry, I would like to address you first, Lord Mayor, because true to form I expect that you will be invited to lots of 100th birthdays. They are always enjoyable, these events, because they have all the families. The ones that I visited were still very much active within their families and having an interest in what was going on in the city. It was quite enjoyable to ask them what their secrets were.

None of them said about their lifestyle. They all said that they had worked hard but they did not really, they were just saying that they enjoyed being

with their family. There was a debate in the Lord Mayor's office whether we should be expecting the Queen to raise that 100th birthday to 105 because there are so many to go to.

The reason I am bringing it up is that we now have the revelation that over a third of all 13 year-olds in Leeds are overweight - 22,500, approximately, obese and, if current trends continue, today's children are going to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents, so that could be the end of the 100th birthdays.

The note from the Scrutiny Board said that according to the British Medical Association, the dramatic increase in childhood overweight and obesity places significant health and financial burdens and warrants strong and comprehensive efforts at prevention. In 2004 the House of Commons Health Committee also estimated that the economic burden of overweight and obesity, if established, the potential could cost in the region of £3.3m to £3.7m.

Obesity has been a key public health issue both nationally and locally. The Scrutiny Board recommended that the Council's Executive Members responsible for Children's Services and Health and Social Care also play a proactive role in implementing the Leeds Childhood Obesity Strategy.

I ask Council Members here today that we can all be champions. There are a lot of us who are governors at schools and I understand 75 schools have signed up to the Be Healthy campaign. I was lucky enough to be at that launch. It is not about putting children on diets. It is all about exercise, healthy food and making sure that there is provision for green space and other leisure activities for young people. I would ask you to promote this within your schools and I am sure Education Leeds would welcome that.

One of the things that touched me was, a lot of it was to do with how children feel about themselves and if they are happy and healthy and fit, I am sure we can all look forward to a much healthier population in Leeds. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you, Councillor Lancaster. Councillor Grahame, do you want to make a comment? No. I thought you did. Councillor Bale.

COUNCILLOR BALE: Thank you, Lord Mayor. In commenting on the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Board for Children and Young People I would like to express particular thanks to the co-opted members of the Scrutiny Board who bring so much valuable expertise to the Board and give so much time to its work.

I would like to draw particular attention to page 43, the work on fair trade in schools, which resulted in a deputation to Council last year by the Leeds Youth Council and which led to the Scrutiny Enquiry conducted by young people themselves and supported by the Scrutiny Unit. I think it was an admirable exercise in bringing young people's attention to democratic processes and allowing them to understand the democratic processes of the Council and we very much hope that that partnership with the Youth Council will continue.

I also want to say something in particular about the report on the Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres, which I know has been a particular concern to

many Members of Council, where we saw many examples of excellent practice concerned with marrying together the benefits of special education and high quality inclusion and we addressed the particular problems that had concerned many members, which are the problems in the north-west SILC where our recommendations included a managed reduction, perhaps, in the number of partnerships with mainstream schools, each of which made very heavy demands on resources.

Finally, perhaps, one of the major activities of the year where I believe we demonstrated the sort of partnership that needs to exist between Scrutiny and the Executive was in the implementation of the Children Act, where the submission of the Scrutiny Board's interim report I believe helped to shape the structures which were established leading up to the appointment of the Director of Children's Services on 1 March. Thank you, Lord Mayor.
(*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. Councillor Anderson wants to make a comment.

COUNCILLOR ANDERSON: I will be quick. I know that is unusual for me but I will be quick. I do want formally in this Council to give my thanks to the Scrutiny Board last year because we had some really knotty – in all senses, both 'naughty' as in 'naughty' and 'knotty' as in a bit complicated issues to deal with. I think we dealt with them in a non-partisan way.

What I am about to say here, I do not want people to misinterpret it, but Alison and I, I think, we were able to articulate from both sides a lot of the issues. I will watch what I am doing with my hands then, before people do get me into trouble! (*Laughter*) We were able to have discussions and get officers to debate things in a non- confrontational manner. I think it is something that certainly I have learned from my years on Scrutiny that that was one of the problems I always saw, that sometimes officers were reluctant sometimes to disclose information and the way we managed to do it by probing and working as a team and not trying to disrupt any meetings or anything like that.

I think at the end of the year we reached a number of conclusions, one of which we are going to be discussing further this afternoon in terms of grounds maintenance and I will leave any comments on that until later on, but that was certainly a good start to the year. I would ask you all to not exactly read the report but to actually start looking more thoroughly into this Strategy that is coming around, because if we get this wrong as a Council, it will cost us millions unless we get it right, and that is why hopefully we can reach a political consensus on the way forward.

During the election there were some bits of misinformation that were going around, which did not reassure the residents and then leads to problems in terms of what is being planned. I think the only way forward – we tried to, as I said, keep the politics out of it.

(*Interruption*) You were not on this one this time so hence the reason politics actually was not involved this time. We did try and work in a cohesive manner.

Finally, I would also like to thank Sharon Winfield, the officer who gave me great support for the last couple of years and now that Richard Mills has been

given the poisoned chalice of looking after me, it will be interesting to see how he copes. I did want to put on record my thanks to all the Scrutiny Board for the support they gave me this year and also the officers as well. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. Councillor Proctor to sum up.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Chair. I would like to thank the Scrutiny Boards, all the members who serve on them and also the Chairs of those Scrutiny Boards for the valuable work that they have done during the course of this year. I am sure I speak for all of my Executive Member colleagues when I say we look forward to another year of grilling. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I call for a vote now? All in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The motion was carried)

ITEM 5(b)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. We will move on to Agenda Item 5(b). Councillor Proctor again.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor, I move in terms of the notice.

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: Lord Mayor, I second.

THE LORD MAYOR: Straight to vote. All in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The motion was carried)

ITEM 5(c)

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Yes thank you, Lord Mayor. I sought advice from the Chief Legal Officer to see if I needed to declare an interest in this matter. I am advised that I do not, therefore I move in terms of the notice, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR HAMILTON: Second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: I will call for the vote. All in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The Motion was carried)

ITEM 6 – QUESTIONS

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I will try and keep this positive and constructive atmosphere going. I wonder if I could ask the Council, would the Leader of the Council please tell me what his administration is doing to tackle sick leave taken by Council employees?

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Yes, Lord Mayor, I have a five page answer which if I read would be the end of Questions, so at this juncture I will say we are doing a lot and I will wait for the supplementary.

COUNCILLOR K WAKEFIELD: By way of supplementary it can be more specific so we can be quicker. Would the Leader of the Council explain to the Council what he is doing to address the growing crisis at the flagship Contact Centre in sickness absence which is leading to only 85% of the calls being answered and, indeed, 14 days per employee sickness and absence, which is amounting to 300,000 in the five months that it has been set up to the end of the financial year.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Lord Mayor, I am not aware of a crisis at the Leeds Contact Centre. Indeed, only this morning we were looking at the success rate of call answering at the Contact Centre compared to twelve months ago. Twelve months ago approximately 38% of calls offered to the then myriad of call centre facilities round the city, only 38% were being answered. As of this April the figure has risen, as Keith Wakefield has already said, to 85%.

Now, if the activities of the staff in the Contact Centre are delivering that sort of improvement – we are not talking about 10%, 20%, 30% improvement in the answering of calls, we are talking about over 100% improvement – you cannot describe what is going on there as a crisis. There is sickness across the Authority in many departments. We are dealing with that in a variety of ways. The measures that we are applying in other departments are applied equally to the Contact Centre. I have no reason to believe there is a specific problem there and, as I say, on the contrary, the dramatic improvement in our answering rate illustrates exactly how well our new Contact Centre is working and absolutely vindicates the investment we have made into it. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Lord Mayor, I did ask about sickness and mentioned some of the dates.

THE LORD MAYOR: It is up to Councillor Harris how he answers the question. We move on to Question 2. Councillor Kabeer Hussain.

COUNCILLOR HUSSAIN: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Can the Leader of the Council comment on the administration's commitment to funding Social Services in Leeds.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Yes, Lord Mayor. Away from the hurly burly of elections and away from the budget discussions when so many of these figures get wrapped up with other things, this is a good opportunity for us to focus absolutely on the issue of Social Services and our commitment to the funding of Social Services.

Including the current financial year, by the end of this financial year, our third in control of Leeds City Council, we will have increased spending on Social Services by over £45m. If you take that as a percentage of the budget we inherited, that is a 25% increase in the Social Services budget over three years, which is by anybody's standards substantial.

It is interesting, however, if you compare that figure with the last three years of the Labour administration. In their last three years they increased their spending on Social Services by £20m. We are talking in real terms now. So their increase was in real terms half of our increase over the same period. When you look at that £20m as a percentage of the budget that Labour had, that was a 13.6% increase in the last three years.

Just to reiterate, Lord Mayor, by way of underlining this administration's commitment to Social Services, we have increased spending in that department in three years by double what Labour did in their last three years, which in percentage terms is twice as much increase in the budget as they managed in their final three years.

I say this, really, for the last time and let us be clear about this – that money is found from our prudent management of this Council. If we injected into Social Services the money that the Labour Government thinks we should, then the increase would have been not £40m, not £30m, not £20m but around £10m, so it would have been £30m less. That is what your Government wants us to do - £30m less than in fact we have now injected.

Stop telling the people of Leeds that there are cuts. A £45m increase is an astronomical increase. It is not a cut. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Hussain, have you got a supplementary?

COUNCILLOR HUSSAIN: No supplementary.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Carter.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: Yes, Lord Mayor, I am sure Councillor Harris wants another go at this so I am going to ask him, would he like to communicate his views on sickness levels across the authority?

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Yes. (*Laughter*)

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: My Lord Mayor, by way of supplementary, the Leader of the Opposition got on to this tack at the last Executive Board meeting. It seems to me that the Leader of Council might want to pay tribute to the 55% of staff who work for this Authority who...

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Carter, it should be a question, please.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: It is a question.

THE LORD MAYOR: OK, get to the point.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: There was a question mark in there! I will repeat it, Lord Mayor. It seems to me the Leader of Council might want to express his views on the fact that 55% of the staff who work for this Authority – perhaps the Labour Group do not want to celebrate this – took either no sick leave or minimal sick leave in the past twelve months. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Lord Mayor, of course I want to pay tribute to those employees. Indeed, I want to pay tribute to all our employees for what they are doing to work with us to manage the unacceptably high level of sickness absence we inherited from the Labour administration. That is not to say that we are being complacent because far from it, but again let us just be clear on what is going on.

In the last two years sickness levels have come down by one-and-a-half days across the Authority. The decline in sickness levels in the last twelve months equates to an extra 7,500 days of time worked by our employees. That is 7,500 man days of extra service delivered at no extra cost to us. That is the proper way to manage sickness levels. We expect this year for it to fall again. It is absolutely driven by the vast majority of our employees who come to work either all the time or those frankly who come to work when they are under the weather but they are so committed to this place that they go the extra mile.

We are not focusing on people who are genuinely ill. We are simply focusing on some employees who sometimes think it is easier to turn over in the morning and stay in bed than get up and come here. They are a minority. They do not do this Council a service by behaving that way, they do not do the people of Leeds a service and nor do they do a service to the vast majority of their colleagues who absolutely do their damndest for this place. *(Applause)*

COUNCILLOR LEADLEY: My Lord Mayor, could the Executive Board member for Development please tell us what reporting procedures are in place to ensure that Plans Panels, City Council Ward members and Town and Parish Councils are kept informed of planning compliance activity within their geographical areas of responsibility?

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: Thank you, Councillor Leadley. As you are probably aware, new computer facilities are now in place to produce status reports on planning compliance matters. Work is in hand to enable a brief commentary to be added to the standard reports so we can identify more precisely the current status of the case.

During July 2006 a schedule by ward will be produced listing current cases on hand at the end of the first quarter 2006/7. Cases resolved and formal actions taken will be produced and circulated to ward members. A full update will be produced following the close of each successive quarter.

Information on cases where breaches have been found will be extracted and forwarded to the relevant Parish and Town Councils within those wards. An update list of formal actions taken and the outcomes of appeals and prosecutions if any will be reported to ward members on a monthly basis.

In summary, while we are not in a position to give full reports, they are going to commence next month and there will be further announcements.

THE LORD MAYOR: Do you have a supplementary, Councillor Leadley?

COUNCILLOR LEADLEY: My Lord Mayor, does Councillor Carter remember that word for word I asked the same question at the Council meeting held on 8 September 2004 when he assured us that early improvements were at hand? It does seem rather disappointing that it has taken so long to get here. In fact, we have not really got anywhere at all, although it seems as if we might get there next month.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: Yes, my Lord Mayor, I am well aware of that. I am grateful to Councillor Leadley for the supplementary because it gives me the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Review which, of

course, is covering all matters relating to the Planning Department, including compliance issues. That large piece of work was tabled at the last Executive Board meeting and is going to be rolled out over the next months and years.

It is true to say that two years ago we inherited a planning department where the staff were under worked, the vacancy factors were at record levels and the number of planning applications, which is a plus, were at record levels and remain at record levels.

We have implemented or are about to implement the first strategic review of planning that anybody in this Council Chamber with the possible exception of Councillor Atha can remember.

So, my Lord Mayor, I make no apology for the delays other than to say, like Councillor Leadley, I am a ward member and I get exasperated when I cannot get information that I want in the time I want about issues in my own ward, but planning is a very complex subject, a very complex department and the officers in planning are working under extremely heavy workloads and we do hope to see the improvements I outlined in my initial answer beginning in July, but the improvements in planning are going to take a considerable time to roll out in their totality. It is forced to be the case with a department that has been so starved of funding for so long.

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Will the Leader of the Council please tell me whether he still supports his statement made in a letter to all Council staff on 29 June 2004, that, “Where change is agreed which impacts upon staff, we are committed to treating you fairly”?

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Absolutely.

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Thank you, Lord Mayor. By way of supplementary, does he not accept that to give people who have worked for jobs and skills, some of them 17, 18 years, four days’ notice that they no longer work for the Council is totally unacceptable, is totally unfair and probably illegal? (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: I am grateful that Keith Wakefield has given me an opportunity to air this matter in public.

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Answer the question.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Which is what I am about to do. It is important that we understand what has happened here before we take some planned approach of accusations on unfairly treating staff.

Before I get there, I underline and reiterate, we have no intention whatsoever to treat any of our staff unfairly. We stand on our heads to do the right thing by them, which I hasten to say – and I will underline in a minute – is a damn sight more than you lot ever did and a damn sight more than your Government is doing now.

Now, let us get to the bottom of this issue. This relates to the jobs and skills, to the new deal service that we offer through our Family Learning Centres. That is a beacon award service which has been nationally recognised as absolutely top drawer. We were required to re-bid for that contract, which we did so earlier this year and then we waited to find out what the result was.

We found out in April, at the end of April, not by formal notification from your Government but simply by trawling the internet, that in fact we had not got the contract. It is absolutely true and we will prove the facts to you if you want. We had not been notified. We had to find out by trawling the internet. We found out that the contract had been awarded to – and I do not mind this *per se* – a private sector company.

So, we contacted them straightaway to ask if this was correct. They were unable to tell us. Indeed, it was the middle of May before they were prepared to indicate to us that they thought it was correct but could not discuss any issues with us about employment until they had formal notification. That was the position in which we found ourselves.

You cannot start telling staff that they are going to be TUPE-ed or anything else if you have not been told whether you have got the contract or not or, indeed, where they are going to be TUPE-ed or if they are supposed recipients of those employees will not talk to you. That was the position we found ourselves in and that went on into June. An absolutely appalling situation through no fault of ours.

It is your Government that has put us in that position and so at that juncture we began to explore the situation with our staff. I say to you again, what do you say to staff when we do not know the legal position because we do not know where they are supposed to be TUPE-ed? That is not our fault. That is all the fault of your Government and their hopeless behaviour. (*Applause*)

However, since you raise the issue of fairness, what about this for fairness? There was legislation enacted in 1997 about fair pay for Council employees. What did your administration do about paying those people fairly? Nothing. You did nothing. You carried on making sure that the women in particular were not paid equally or fairly. That is your commitment to fairness and it is our administration that have paid your debts and made sure that all our employees are paid and treated fairly. That is our commitment. Your record is abysmal. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Penny Ewens, did you want to ask a question?

COUNCILLOR EWENS: Yes. Can the Executive Board Member for Children's Services please tell us how he sees his new role?

COUNCILLOR BRETT: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I want to start by thanking Councillor Ewens for allowing me to say a few words about the current position and in particular I want to acknowledge the work that has been done for the last couple of years by Councillor Jennings and a growing team of Council Officers and others outside this Council to prepare the way for the massive changes that we are planning in response to the 2004 Children Act.

As many of you will know, this Act insists that we have a Children's Lead Member by 2008 who takes political responsibility for all of children's services. I am honoured to be the first local politician who takes on this exciting task.

The administration has decided that a second Executive Board member will assist me. It is such a giant area, covering over 60% of the Council's spending, that we think it needs a second Executive Member to cover this

huge area. Councillor Harker will assist me by taking responsibility in this Chamber for all matters to do with education, early years and the youth service. He will continue to answer questions and queries from all Councillors both in Council and outside and at Executive Board, but I have the ultimate political responsibility for all that goes on in children's services. I will deal with children's social services, with safeguarding and with strategic issues to do with commissioning.

I have heard it said by members in this Chamber that this bill is a sledgehammer to crack a nut and I want to put in record that I totally disagree with that view. I support the basic tenets of the 2004 Children Act. While I have numerous disagreements and issues with some of the detail in the Bill and in much of the voluminous guidance, I totally support the main thrust of this Bill which is, put simply, children and young people up to the age of 19 must be at the centre of our services to and for them. Professionals from the health service, police and voluntary sector must be able to talk and pass information to our staff in education and children's social services. The silence that we have all worked in must be broken down, not just for the extreme cases like Victoria Climbié but for all our children. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Ewens, did you want to ask a supplementary?

COUNCILLOR EWENS: Supplementary, Lord Mayor, thank you. Can the Executive Member further tell us, please, what his priorities are in his role?

COUNCILLOR BRETT: Since the 2004 Act was the result of concern for vulnerable children and young people, it will not surprise you to learn that this is an area where we have a lot of early work to do. I want to stress that vulnerable young people are not only found in the inner city. There are many youngsters who have plenty of cash but are starved in other ways which means that they need our support.

I will be taking to Executive Board in July a paper on our Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting. I hope all Councillors will feel able to play their part, as we are all Corporate Parents.

Next month we will be launching the Children and Young People's Plan that we looked at in this Chamber in April with a group of our partners. This is now a live working document, with targets and outcomes that we are already working hard to achieve.

The major task for the Children's Team for this summer will be to move forward on the Children's Trust Arrangements by completing the review of the current Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

I intend that this development work will involve all Councillors through seminars which will hopefully show us the way forward over the next three months. Thank you, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR ANDERSON: Would the Executive member for Development please update the Council on the progress of the Arena?

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: As members may or may not be aware, we agreed after the Cultural Facilities Taskgroup completed their piece of work for the Authority last year, at the end of last year, to appoint further

consultants to advise on procurement. Unfortunately we had to advertise the appointment through the European Journal, which is quite right but frustrating inasmuch as it takes that extra bit of time to get things moving.

I am pleased to tell you that we have now appointed those consultants and, as it happens, they happen to be the same consultants who carried out the first piece of work, which to me indicates something of a benefit to us because they ought to be well aware of what the first study showed, well aware of what the Council requires and to paraphrase it, to hit the ground running.

The Director of Development will be meeting with the consultants very shortly and I shall be meeting with them following that and we will both be underlining the speed with which we expect that report to be returned to this Council so that we can then hopefully make the next step forward.

I think I should just perhaps say this, Councillor Anderson, to all Members of Council. You should all be aware that this is a facility that the city has lacked for a long time. There have been abortive attempts in the past to try and deliver such a facility to the city. Other cities, who benefit from a great deal more investment from Europe and, indeed, Her Majesty's Government than we do, have been able to provide those facilities some long time ago.

The simple fact is this, that this city is in competition with all other major cities in this country. When businesses choose to relocate, when students decide which university they want to apply to, they all look at the offering of the area they want to move to and that offering has to cut across all sorts of boundaries – not only provide good housing, good environment, good quality of life but good cultural facilities as well.

It is imperative, in my view, that this city moves this project forward with all sensible speed and I am pleased to say that we will be expecting a report from the CMP, the consultants appointed for this piece of work, very quickly.

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Can the Executive member responsible for education update the Council on progress with the programme to replace temporary buildings used in local high schools?

COUNCILLOR HARKER: My Lord Mayor, in the last two years we have been able to remove 25% of the temporary classrooms which we inherited. We expect to continue this progress as and when money for investment becomes available. I accept - because we have had this conversation across the Chamber several times – that it is slow progress, but it is a lot faster than it was prior to my taking office.

I do recognise the issues facing some of our schools and particularly, as I have said in this Chamber before, Bruntcliffe High School and particularly their maths department, which I visited. We are working towards the elimination of these temporary classrooms but it is a matter of finance.

THE LORD MAYOR: Would you like to ask a supplementary?

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Very briefly, can the Executive Board member revisit if not physically intellectually Bruntcliffe High School again?

COUNCILLOR HARKER: Sorry, I am missing 'revisit it'?

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Can you revisit it, keep it in mind when you have got any extra cash?

COUNCILLOR HARKER: I was sitting here earlier this afternoon thinking I ought to invite you for coffee along with the officers and we will discuss it.

THE LORD MAYOR: All the time for questions has been used up and any unanswered questions, a written response will be sent to all members. Thank you.

ITEM 7 – RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: I move, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR CARTER: I second in terms of the notice.

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. I call for the vote. All in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The motion was carried)

ITEM 8 - RECOMMENDATIONS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE.

COUNCILLOR KIRKLAND: I move the recommendation of the Standards Committee with regard to their annual report in the terms of the notice. You will find that on pages 65 to 79 inclusive of the agenda papers.

COUNCILLOR J L CARTER: I second, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All in favour? Any abstentions? Any against?

(The motion was carried)

ITEM 9 - MINUTES.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: I move, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: I second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: I will invite comments on the Minutes now. Councillor Downes.

(a) – Executive Board
(i) – Central and Corporate

COUNCILLOR DOWNES: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I would like to comment on Minute 257 on page 82 of the main Council book, progress report on the PPP PFI programme in Leeds. I would like to invite the Leader of Council to join me in congratulating the Public Private Partnership Unit in winning two prestigious national awards at the recent Public Private Finance

Award ceremony. By being voted the best public sector project team and the best Government agency team, they have shown their value to the Council and the city of Leeds. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Lowe, did you want to speak?

COUNCILLOR LOWE: Yes, please. On page 128 of the additional papers, Minute 7. I would like the relevant Executive Board member to comment on paragraph 3.37 of the financial outturn 05/06 and explain to us why there was not proper management of the property maintenance budget for last year. We are told that there is a £1.5m deficit in the service which related to changes for work done which was insufficiently costed and also Executive Board combination of factors including a reduction in the trading base following the loss of maintenance contracts with the ALMOs.

I would have said that this loss in income should have been predicted as the ALMOs have been in place now for several years. Discussions have been ongoing with the ALMOs for several years about the nature of contact with the Council, about the quality of that contact and this should have been predicted, so I think it is a bit disturbing that officers and the Executive Board member were not properly made aware of this and did not have some proper financial planning in the budget.

I also question why the associated costs were not properly reflected in the budget, because it says here that more specifically charges for work done have been insufficient to cover the associated costs, so again I think that that was very severe mismanagement of the budget.

Clearly the item then also goes on to say that the level of income realises less than that that had been anticipated. Again, why was it not predicted? Why was there such bad management of this element of the budget? I am not even going to mention the earlier part of the paper which talks about levels of sickness. We have talked about that but again mismanagement and I want some answers. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: I think many of you as you came into the Council would have seen trainees or employees of Roseville outside and I want to make comment about this very important issue. This is a scheme that has, I think, been in existence well over 20 years. I think it is something that all parties have supported and they have supported it because it gives dignity to disabled people seeking employment and that is very hard to do even in the modern day of legislation and strategies. It is a place where disabled people can go and work, get paid, receive respect, come home and it has been successfully supported by all parties for many years.

Much of the work, for those who do not know, has been around laundry, although that was withdrawn and, indeed, recycling computers. I think one or two colleagues might have bought computers recycled from them, but their main work has been around ALMOs. The ALMO doors and windows. I accept that ALMOs have been in very difficult positions in terms of trying to run a business except as a social obligation, so I accept there have been difficulties with ALMOs.

What I do not accept is the way this was dealt with at Executive Board. I will make two comments on this.

On the Executive Board paragraph – and I will read the appropriate part, 326 – it referred that the problem with the deficit of 2.3, which I accept the reserves went in and it is break even, that is the right thing to do. I have no problems with that and none of us in this room would have problems of seeing reserves going to support such a scheme.

It did say, though, that they were having problems with business and they have an action plan put in place to seek expenditure reductions and alternative areas of business to eliminate this deficit were supposed to be put into place and were not.

I think it is right and proper that Members of Council should really ask the question why it was not put into place in time. I think the previous comments about giving enough notice are very appropriate in this issue.

What I did not also accept as the second point is that at the Executive Board Councillor Harris underlined and emphasised that it was an all party issue. This is a scheme that we should all feel passionately committed to and that we have to avoid any difficulties on an all party basis.

We use ‘all party basis’ in a loose way sometimes, but it has been used. Councillor Carter has referred to the planning strategy, which is an all party document and I hope it gets all party support. The key to that is that members of our group, i.e. the opposition, were involved in early discussions and are continuing to be involved and will be after. If you say it is all party, then I think it is right and proper and decent that you say to members of the opposition, “We have got a problem, would you like to come in, would you like to listen to the problem and, indeed, offer support or ideas and so on?”

What I had from Councillor Harris almost glibly is that we have a problem and we need you to deal with it. So yes, inevitably you nod your head and say, “Yes”. Two days later I found out that 27 members of staff had been given their redundancies. Some of those staff – I have met them and you met them outside, Peter, with me – they have had notice some of them and you met one of them, Peter, were given notices of redundancy. Some of those are disabled staff.

I have to say that if it is all party, then we need to treat them and us a lot better. They deserve it. I do not know but they were outside here today, clearly distressed, clearly worried. Whatever reassurances they have been given quite frankly they do not believe. I think it is time and right that this administration treated those employees better and treated the truth better and told us the full facts, the full truth well before Executive Board, Lord Mayor. Thank you.

COUNCILLOR LEWIS: On the same Minute, Lord Mayor. The Minute reports on the financial outturn for the Housing Revenue Accounts and the sum of £3.5m in working balance and £4.5m earmarked reserves.

In view of the improved financial performance of the ALMOs and what I would say is projected improved performance, it does seem bizarre that we have had the officers of Neighbourhoods and Housing going round the ALMOs with a report that is full of doom and gloom and saying that the only option for the ALMOs of the future is a one or two ALMO option.

I would just welcome the comments of the Executive Member as to whether the adverse response that that report has generated from the ALMO Boards

and the favourable financial position has perhaps made the administration think again.

COUNCILLOR HARRAND: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Just very briefly, I had not intended to speak but just to clarify two things. Nobody at Roseville has got redundancy notices, nobody at Roseville will get redundancy notices. They have got a piece of paper, I think, inviting them to an interview. You show me a document that says 'Notice of Redundancy' and I will apologise immediately, but there are no redundancy notices at Roseville and they will not get the sack either. However you define it, we will not make anybody at Roseville redundant. Nobody will get redundancy.

COUNCILLOR McKENNA: Can we have that in writing?

COUNCILLOR HARRAND: You can have it in writing. There will be no redundancy at Roseville. Is that what you want? Of course you can. Will that shut you up? You can have that. There will be no redundancies at Roseville.

Secondly, the simple fact is that there has been a Labour member on the Board at Roseville throughout all this exercise over the last two years with access to all the figures that I have been given access to and presumably with the ability to keep you informed as I would have like to have been informed in the opposition - Councillor Taggart.

COUNCILLOR J L CARTER: Lord Mayor, just for clarification because I know I have got some comments to make later, if I comment in respect of Councillor Lewis am I OK to comment later? Thank you, Lord Mayor. I am glad you have agreed that.

Richard referred to the HRH reserves and his question unfortunately just stopped before I could answer it. He is quite right, it is £3.4m, the reserves themselves. I do not think anyone has gone round as a prophet of doom to people but what has happened in this administration is a great deal of time, effort and work has gone into trying to make things work and work properly.

Let me just give you a couple of examples. You remember last year when I was standing here and I was being screamed at by a lady just across *there* about hostels. We have improved the service, we are running it for two-thirds of the cost and we are saving half a million. That is reflected in these accounts. Another area which is reflected in these accounts is disrepair. Disrepair is where we fail to repair houses, Council houses, and we are taken to court. The last time that the Labour Council were in power it cost is £2.9m. The first year of our administration it was £1m and now it is down to £279,000. (*Applause*)

We also in times like the Pharaohs of old, in times of plenty we actually store up and we are trying to store some money in for Swarcliffe, we have got an advance payment there which is being properly put away. We have got £1.9m which we are going to redistribute to the ALMOs, so they should be pleased. Ted is going to be smiling all over his face when he receives that. All in all we have had a good time.

Just to answer one final point I would like to make in what has been said by Richard. We went out for consultation, genuine and proper consultation on the ALMO reorganisation. We said all along that we were prepared to listen to that. One of the things that has come back very strongly, extremely

strongly from those consultations, is that on the ballot paper they would like to see an option for three ALMOs – not two and one but three and another. We are now looking at that to put that on to the ballot paper, which I think a lot of people want and a lot of people would like and it could well be our preferred one which we will actually literally try to canvass for. There will be two options on the ballot paper and we will be seeing a three on the ballot paper.

That is as a result of listening to people, something which people over there do not appear to want to do most of the time. Thank you.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I just want to discuss the Roseville situation. I was reminded when I was out there talking, that I was present at the opening of that new centre several years ago and that was a time when all members – and I remember Penny White, who people may not remember, who had the same passion for doing the right kind of thing that I find sadly lacking today. There was unanimity amongst the parties to make it happen. There are people in this Council Chamber who have the same passion that I have for doing the right thing for these poor individuals who are the most disadvantaged in our society because they have so many problems that they cannot live a normal life without very considerable support.

Peter will nod and agree with that – nothing I have said he will disagree with. Where we do disappear in different directions is in what is happening, because what is happening now is, I think, a tragic disgrace. If we cannot maintain an organisation which allows people with those disabilities to engage in useful work, to become useful members of society who will be paying taxes and National Insurance charges on them, who will feel a sense of dignity and self worth which they will never do so long as they are treated as people with a disability which means they are a drag on society, they have got to be given help and so on.

Anyone who went out there and saw the people I am referring to now will know what the problem is. Anyone who has dealt with them will know what a burden carers, parents of people who have mentally handicapped children - and I use the old-fashioned term because 'learning disability' is a euphemism that covers a variety of things. Look at the carers of people who have a mentally handicapped child and they worry about the next ten years, 20 years. Then there comes a terrible point which they look at when they will no longer be able to care for them because they will be gone.

We have a special responsibility for those people and quite frankly to say there will be no redundancies – we are told some have been given redundancy papers. Either they are right or you are right, but irrespective of who is right on that, if you are going to deploy those people into other corporation departments and try to give them some useful work, you are going to find it impossible. Some of those people were at special school together, they had their adolescence together, they have gone to the training centre together, they have gone into Roseville together. The impact on their lives is going to be dramatic.

We will go away from this Council having a glass of wine or a beer or whatever it is – we may even watch some football, God knows what we might do – but those people are going to be carrying the problem with them as they leave. That is a problem I do not think we should be leaving with them.

So, Peter, if you say “Your lot should have done” – and you keep using this term “your lot”, which is a bit of an imprecise and useless and rather derogatory term used by the two leaders from time to time, but assuming we are “that lot” – if we did not do it right, that is no excuse to you for not doing it right. If that is your argument, we will accept it but in fact you are doing something, you are in effect closing down Roseville. We know it, we know the impact it is going to have on those people and all I would say to you and your colleagues – and I do not think any of you are hard-hearted Dickensian-type villains – all I ask you to do is to look again at what we can do with Roseville to make it so that these people can have even a fraction of the quality of life which we enjoy by normal living standards.

It is a question and a plea for you to look again at this, look again at how you handle these people and if in fact you are going to go ahead with this scheme, then get someone along as an arbiter to see that these individuals are not put in circumstances where in fact they are going to suffer the problems I have outlined.

We want no more crocodile tears we have had from Councillor Harker over there who was closing schools. Yes, he hates closing schools but by God, isn't he good at it? We do not actually want to see that here.

COUNCILLOR HARKER: You never closed a school, did you?

COUNCILLOR ATHA: Yes I did, one and that was only because the parents asked me to close it – asked me to close it. I will answer the question – yes I did close a school, Moor Grange and why did I close it? Because the parents came and asked me to close it because previously we decided not to. It is no good heckling, Les, because quite frankly you are getting to be a bit of a pain in the neck. You used to be quite a nice chap – now you are getting a pain in the neck. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Hanley first, Councillor Carter.

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Lord Mayor, I just wanted to make a quick comment on the issue that Councillor Les Carter raised and that is the consultation on the ALMOs.

Bramley is quite a large ward. I think we have about 18,500 people there, not everyone lives in a Council house, but many thousands do. The consultation event he refers to we had a good number of officers, we had Councillors there and we had five people – five, not 500 or 5,000, five people – that was the consultation. It was before Christmas, that is quite right.

The other point on the ballot paper, this is a democracy that we live in and you have a responsibility to be democratic. If the choices are there, no matter how you have trumped up these figures, this utter schoolboy nonsense that you have presented to us and the report, the response from Leeds West Homes clearly indicates what we think the issue should be. You should give the people of this city the choice of six. That is what we have got at the moment. It ain't broke, don't fix it.

COUNCILLOR WILSON: As chair of Roseville I would just like to say a few words about Roseville, things that have been taking place over the last twelve months. Bernard, I can assure you that the Board of Roseville take it very seriously and our interest is the best interests of the people at

Roseville and that goes throughout the full Board, so be reassured, there is no falling off of any concern or desire to do the right thing at Roseville.

The main employment work at Roseville is the windows. Now, because the window situation is slowly drying up, there was always going to be a problem at Roseville over the next three or four years. That problem has been exacerbated by the fact that the ALMOs are now arms' length organisations. It would have been very nice if we could have insisted on a certain amount of work being placed with the Roseville Enterprises.

Roseville I suppose to some extent has been very successful in the past and probably the Council have lost track about what Roseville was doing. It was providing work for disadvantaged people. I think the number is something like 129 people working there at the moment, of which I think 85 are handicapped in one way or another.

There was going to be a problem eventually but, as I say, the fact that the ALMOs have got their own independence, if you like, meant that they could order the work where they deemed fit.

I have been running up on a regular basis. I can assure you, the Board is fully behind Roseville. They have been reassured this dinnertime by Peter and myself that there are going to be no redundancies.

I understand that the people at Roseville feel secure there. They are working with people like themselves and to put out into TUPE-ed and that, they have a worried and a fear about it. I understand that. We will be taking each one as an individual case and working very carefully through it. Rest assured, I am sure the whole Council have the best wishes for Roseville at heart. I just simply say that. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR J L CARTER: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I want to comment on what has been said about Roseville. I am astonished and disappointed, bitterly disappointed, that Councillor Wakefield should have introduced the matter in the way he did, which opened the gate to the intemperate and downright scandalous comments made by Councillor Atha.

Councillor Atha, there are people in this Chamber who know a great deal more about living with people with learning difficulties, the need for those people to have friendships, than you will ever know, if you know anything at all. I find it wholly unpalatable to listen to a sanctimonious lecture from somebody who is deliberately trying to stir up trouble. There are numerous Councillors in this Chamber who have much more experience of dealing with the problems that people in our community have than you will ever have and there are Councillors on these benches – and I include myself particularly.

My Lord Mayor, you get down to what Councillor Atha when he thinks about it when he refers to our people working in Roseville as “those people”, as “those people” and then he refers to them as “these people.” The people who work in Roseville are part of our community (*Applause*) and you have heard, Bernard, the categorical assurances given by Councillor Harrand. Your Leader, if he had listened, heard the categorical assurances given by Councillor Harris. You will now hear them from me. There will be no redundancies given to handicapped people in Roseville because we value their place in our community. They are part of our community. Not “those people” Bernard,

not “these people”, Bernard. Part of our community. Crawl back in your hole. (*Applause*) Your contribution was beneath contempt. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: A long time ago Councillor Downes raised the question of our extremely successful PFI team and he asked me if I would join with the whole Council in congratulating them on their recent successes with the two national awards they have won. The answer, of course, is yes.

Whilst I have often expressed my concern that the only major source of capital investment for us in this Authority – indeed in every Authority – is via the PFI route, nevertheless because that is the game in town, it means that we have really got to make it work and the team we have got deliver for us 110%. For those of you who are involved in the final step in the Little London PFI contract, you go through this thing called Gateway Review where a team from the Ministry turns up to ask all sorts of questions about whether we have got the capacity to deliver, the people to deliver, the commitment to deliver and every time, whatever else they may think about me or anybody else, our officers come out with flying colours because they are nationally recognised now to being absolutely top drawer in this field and that is why we get more PFI city in this money than any other Local Authority and they should be congratulated and thanked, because without them we would not have anything resembling a capital programme.

Councillor Lowe raised issues of the outturn, directed the question to Councillor Smith who at the time had left the Chamber. He is there now. In fairness to him, I am not in a position to answer the questions in the way you could have them answered. It is unfair to ask him to try and answer them now because he did not hear the question. We are very happy to invite you for a cup of tea and we will do our best to give you the answers that you require, OK?

Now, the rest of it has really turned on this question of Roseville and I will begin by saying this. You may say it is a hollow promise but I make this assurance in public now. If whilst I am Leader or Deputy Leader of this Authority we issue redundancy notices and make those very needy people redundant from Roseville, I will instantly resign from Council. I give that absolute undertaking. (*Applause*)

There are no circumstances – I cannot give a better personal undertaking than that. It is better than anything any of you ever managed to come up with. You presided over disaster after disaster and you all stood there and said, “Well, nowt to do with us, guv, it was somebody else.” I am telling you, if we make any of those employees at Roseville redundant, which is what we are discussing, people who absolutely depend upon us for assistance and to a large degree protected employment, I will resign and I will be held to it.

The tragedy of all of this is that it has to be raised in this way. The assurance has been given at Executive Board and one thing that sticks in my craw is, you, the Labour Group, telling us about what we are doing wrong and why you would do it differently. Where is your director on Roseville? Where is he? I can tell you. Neil Taggart has attended one Board meeting in the last year. Where is your commitment to Roseville when your director cannot be bothered turning up to try to help to manage what is an extremely unfortunate and difficult position?

What is the difficult position? The difficult position is this, that your Government created the ALMOs and gave them the independence to place orders where they wanted and no matter how much we try, the ALMOs will not place the level of orders at Roseville that is necessary to keep up
(*Interruption*) (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: If I may say this, we talk about disability in this Chamber. Other people talk after the red light comes on because they have got a voice. I am disabled and I need a microphone to speak with. That is discrimination.

THE LORD MAYOR: Leader, you have made your point, thank you. Please sit down. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR ATHA: Is it right, Lord Mayor, that a Councillor should (*inaudible*) I am going to crawl back into my hole now.
(*Interruption*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Please sit down. Members of Council, have some respect. Can we have no comments across each other, please. Thank you. No comments. Leader, please. Can we move on, please to next item and I will be fair with everybody. Please do not underestimate me and do not abuse my powers. Thank you. (*Applause*) Just because it is my first day and some members think, “We have got an easy ride here”, I am sorry. I always deceive people and I do not show my cards and I will start showing my cards now. Do not look peculiar, do as you are told, grow up. Peter Gruen.

(ii) Development

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: Lord Mayor, thank you very much. I think we know you well and know all your positive attributes very well on this side of the Chamber.

Yesterday, Lord Mayor, I attended an Information Appeal – this is page 86, Minute 266 – of information that was withheld from me. I want to thank all four elected members on the Panel. I think they considered the appeal fairly and I felt I was well treated.

This is really an appeal to us 99 elected members and it is really an appeal that if we do not watch the way we go, then soon we will be able to say nothing at all. What happened yesterday was that due to a very narrow legal interpretation of Counsel’s advise that was taken, I think those four elected members found themselves in a position where they could not release information, although my view was that they were very sympathetic in releasing the information.

I tell you this. Imagine your own ward and you have a proposal for a dual carriageway right through your whole ward and you have the potential of thousands of houses being built in your ward and the officers never even address the point that this has an effect on your ward. They do not even say, “Oh, we agree with you, Councillor Gruen, this has potentially a huge effect on your ward.” If they said that, they would then have to say, “And we think we agree with you, you have a right to know the information you are requesting.”

Because they apply these narrow, legal, restrictive covenants to us, and they are getting worse, every single further alteration of the constitution ties us further into knots, every further standards issue means we are yet further restricted in applying what I said yesterday was the one commodity I think we have far more of than officers and that is common sense.

Our common sense, because we are gifted amateurs, not necessarily professionals at this, our common sense on behalf of our constituents tells us that if you are being inundated on a particular issue, that it is important to them and that you are being looked to and in fact the whole legislation tells us we are champions of our community, so why should we not try and champion and find out the information?

When I am not even given – and I will now be given, I have to say – the cost of the advice to Council that was incurred in taking Counsel’s advice, but it is Council taxpayers who are paying for that advice and I was not even given that by the officers, I really begin to wonder where we will be in twelve months’ time, whether I will actually be allowed to speak on an issue which has been turned down already.

My appeal is, and my warning to elected members is, there are issues in your own ward coming up and in all of our wards. At the last Corporate Governance Committee we were told that planning is the issue most referred to by ordinary people in this city to the Ombudsman. They are most worried about issues to do with planning and the longer we engage in a kind of secret sect where all of the Panel – and in fact I think it was Councillor Smith who asked the most pertinent question yesterday, with respect to the others, because his probing showed that no matter what Counsel’s advice would have been, no matter what it would have been, it would never have been allowed to be given to me, but it would have been given to ten members of the Executive Board and to eight members of the Panel. That is 18 out of 99 who have nothing to do with the ward in question would get the information but the ward members would not. I just think that defies logic and it defies the common touch and I think we need to do something about this.

Three years ago, Andrew, you put a resolution down about delegations and your concerns about officers and the way the constitution and things were going. I know it is comfortable now to bury that for the time being but I really genuinely believe – and this is not having any quarrel with the four people of yesterday – that this is the wrong decision, we are going down the wrong path because we cannot act properly. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR GRAHAME: Thank you, Lord Mayor, I wish to withdraw.

COUNCILLOR LEADLEY: Perhaps I can do two things. I can follow up from what Councillor Gruen said, because I was on the Development Plan Panel and we had sight of that advice but we had to hand the copies back in. Obviously I am not a lawyer but I cannot see why Councillor Gruen could not be in a similar position having sight of it and handing it back in in some lawyer’s office, because he is under the same obligation of secrecy as the rest of us are. I cannot see why we should be some sort of select band which has sight of the information when he does not.

Anyway, we will pass on to the question I was going to raise which is, my Lord Mayor, I wish to comment on Minute 275 of the Executive Board

meeting held on 17 May 2006 which begins at the foot of page 89. This tells of £605,000 of Section 106 money being handed to the Yorkshire Housing Association to help it buy nine two- bedroom flats at Fearn's Island Mills in East Leeds.

I think what this shows is the immense cost of security tiny numbers of new social housing dwellings, in this case supposedly affordable, though probably in fact merely less unaffordable than the rest.

In the absence of any real change in Government policy on social housing, it underlines the need to avoid wherever possible the demolition of cheaper housing, whether it be back to backs, through terraces or older Council houses. Thank you, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Carter to sum up.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. I will comment on what Councillor Gruen has said first of all.

I should not need to remind Councillor Gruen, but I will. The protocols, policies, bureaucratic nightmare that is Leeds City Council has come about not because of you, Peter, but because of your Government. It is your Government that has so restructured and confined the way local authorities work and at least Bernard has the decency on this occasion to nod in agreement because he knows I am right.

No Government in living memory has so constrained the whole of local Government as this Labour Government has done. They have bogged us down in every sort of protocol you can think of. The Standards Board, which now appears to be trying to stop any member passing any comment on any planning application whether or not they are a member of the Planning Committee. I have a lot of sympathy with you, but you are talking to the wrong people. Until you were demoted further down there you were supposed to be a high flier. He is going to land a bit like an albatross. You ought to go and talk to your Ministers, tell them what they have done to local Government.

One other thing does stick in my throat about Councillor Gruen passing these comments. Councillor Gruen is a senior civil servant for the Department of Transport – one of the most bureaucratic and secretive departments in the whole of the misbegotten lot down in London. Can you imagine if Mr Page, the Deputy Chief Executive, got a beef about a road going past his house and he writes to the Secretary of State for Transport and says, “I want to see a copy of your Counsel’s opinion”, he would get a one word or two word answer but he would not get Counsel’s opinion.

All we can do is take our legal advice. You have two members on the Plans Panel, two of your senior members. They were both present, they both saw Counsel’s opinion. Actually one of them did not agree with us going to Counsel’s opinion. I am quite happy for you to have the costs. If you want to attack the costs, be my guest because I thought in an attempt to save green belt land from building we would have another crack at Counsel’s opinion, right?

Let me remind you of this, Councillor Gruen, it was your party that put the land in for building – not us, you and you voted for it and now you go and tell your residents how bitterly disappointed you are. You are grasping at

every possible excuse to blame somebody else. You put the land in, the Inspector agreed with you and now you are going to reap the consequences of it – or rather, unfortunately, your residents are.

Thankfully, let me remind you of the White Paper that we passed in the Council that I moved, everybody voted for with the exception of some of your members – and we wrote their names down when they did not vote. We know the couple who voted against it, Councillor Driver. “This Council resolves to do everything possible to preserve and protect green field and green belt sites from developments and welcomes the Leeds Development Plans Panel’s recommendations calling on officers to bring forward appropriate strategies to achieve this protection of our valuable green areas.”

Your constituents can thank us for trying to save them from the mess that you have put them in. (*Applause*)

My Lord Mayor, very quickly, Councillor Leadley’s comments about affordable housing. Absolutely right. One of the morasses of bureaucracy we have been trying to swim through in this past two years that this lot over here never did a damn thing about and someone has already highlighted the lack of affordable housing, is that we will be bringing forward proposals to try and lift the level of affordable housing, particularly homes for sale for so many of the young people in particular and keyworkers in this city who cannot find anywhere to live and cannot get on the first rung of home ownership. It will be this administration that brings forward proposals to improve that situation. (*Applause*)

(iv) Neighbourhoods and Housing

COUNCILLOR LEWIS: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I would just like to speak on page 129 Minute 12, rather than the PFI.

Florence Street and Developments there. Florence Street is utterly unremarkable. It is exactly like so many other streets in that neighbourhood in Harehills, in being very poor quality housing. The decision that was taken by the Exec Board was absolutely the right one to move towards demolition. What concerns me is that we have so many other streets in that area that are exactly the same, exactly as poor as Florence Street. I have heard the kind of dewy-eyed comments about back to backs and comments about affordable housing.

I think people ought to go and have a close look at some of the back to backs in this city and this is not something I have raised here today for the first time. I have raised it plenty of times when we were sitting there as well. I do welcome the moves that the Government has made through Regional Housing Board and through other funds to start tackling it, but it is very slow progress.

If I can just come back to the quality of those back to backs. Ralph will know what I mean. It is poor quality housing in every respect. People need to go in and look at some of these properties. Go up the rickety stairs to the attics. Realise how little insulation there is in those properties, how energy inefficient they are, have a look at the bin yards that surround them full of rotting mattresses and all the rest, look at the damp that is coming through where people have tried to paint over the walls to ensure there is some kind of prevention of water getting in.

I would very much welcome us doing the kind of positive things they are doing in Manchester through Urban Splash, which some people will have read about where you basically gut older properties, but I think we have to be honest, there is a lot of the property in this city, particularly in the Harehills area, where that would just be totally ineffective in cost terms. It just would not pay.

Where it is possible let us look at it by all means but could I just offer our support. If you call a Minister to Leeds to have a look at the problems here, I will happily go along as I did when Tim Yeo came up when he was for a short time Housing Minister to show him the back to backs in the Comptons and the Kelsalls which was helpful in us getting money to improve those, to have a look at the conditions.

We have a huge problem in this city. We have to start tackling it and one street at a time is not sufficient. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR AKHTAR: Lord Mayor, I would like to comment on Minutes 12 on page 129, the late paper in the Executive Board Minutes and the recommendation regarding the plans for regeneration of Florence Street areas of Harehills.

The injection of £1½ m into – and let me repeat this, £1½m – acquiring and clearing the properties in Florence Street's area is very welcoming for the local communities in Harehills. It shows ongoing commitments by this administration to tackling deprivation and narrowing the gap in Gipton and Harehills ward and coming after the recent successful contract in the area, the total investment is going to be over £1b for the next ten to 15 years and that shows how we are succeeding in providing the real investment in Harehills and Gipton.

It is good to hear Councillor Richard Lewis supporting this, but I remember those days when Councillor Lewis was in charge of the housing and very little was done in Harehills, so we really appreciate on behalf of the people of Gipton and Harehills from this administration, so thank you.

THE LORD MAYOR: A lot of new things happening – obviously new Lord Mayor, young blood, new voices. Councillor Richard Brett, please.

COUNCILLOR BRETT: I have to say I agree with many of the things that Richard Lewis has already said. My estimate is that there is somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000. I think Les will probably tell us in a few minutes how many back to back houses there are in Leeds. I believe in Birmingham they have made a museum out of their last ones because they have got rid of them all and it shows how far we have got to go.

I want briefly to welcome the regeneration work which is starting in Cross Green in my ward, which is described in Minute 284 on page 92. This area of Cross Green is, like Florence Street, terraced housing which has been neglected for many years. Residents have told me that they feel they are the forgotten area of Leeds. Thanks to Councillor Les Carter and his Neighbourhoods and Housing Team, a start is being made on regenerating this deprived area. 21 sub-standard properties will be demolished and we hope in due course will be replaced with quality, 21st century homes.

When combined with the East Leeds Link Road, which is starting in November this year, the new intensive Neighbourhood Management Scheme, the plans for new buildings on part of the Copperfield College site and the temporary lorry ban on Cross Green Lane, you can see that the administration is beginning to make a real difference towards narrowing the gap in this long forgotten area. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR PRYKE: Thank you, Lord Mayor. This is amazing. It looks like we are all going to agree on this particular part of the Exec Board thing, because I know Councillor Carter is going to agree with the rest of us here. Maybe he is not going to after all!

Yes, I entirely agree with what Richard has already said about back to backs, but I point out that back to backs do vary in quality enormously quite close to each other. For example, the ones we are talking about coming down here, I think it is called Florence Street but it is not, it is the Little Comptons which are probably the worst bit of Harehills all told. Very close to them we have the Comptons and the Brownhills and the Sutherlands, which are also back to backs in Burmantofts and Richmond Hill ward and they are in very good nick and no-one would ever think of knocking them down for quite a while.

What I really want to talk about is on page 91, Minute 280 and it is about area management and area functioning schedules that are moving over.

One of the most important things that has moved to area management this year is the management of the wardens throughout the city and I think even the opposition has to pay tribute to this administration for making sure the money is available to pay for the wardens after the Labour Government cut the finding for them, so congratulations to Les for that, and also for the PCSOs as well.

The other main task for area management – and area management is becoming more and more important as time goes on, especially as the Government has indicated but given no detail yet that it fancies double devolution. It seems to imply from that that they want power to go down to lower levels, so that people can exercise people power. We are trying to do that in Leeds with area management and I hope that continues because, of course, it is Liberal Democrat policy as well.

One of the main things about area management is partnership working and one of the bigger problems that Leeds faces at the moment is the rise in unemployment, or worklessness. I have to tell you, because I do not think I have seen it in any of the local papers, last month unemployment came down in Leeds. In May 2006 we had a claimant count of 13,988 and that is down from 14,139, so something must be going right in the city at the moment.

If you look at the Council Plan we have got under the thriving harmonious communities target we will reduce unemployment amongst major target groups. What I read from that is that over the last year Leeds City Council has helped – directly helped – 7,998 people into training or employment. We have also run schemes for 316 families, we have run three jobs fairs and there has been 1,604 IT job sessions in libraries and elsewhere.

Leeds City Council is definitely narrowing the gap, so all praise to Councillor Blackburn, wherever he has got to, because that was his job last year.

One of the other things we are aiming for through area management is that again in the Council Plan we will develop strong positive relationships between people from different backgrounds and I will pay tribute to all the work that has gone on from Community Cohesion, especially as the anniversary of 7 July is coming up on us fairly fast.

We know that such good work can be undermined very, very easily by unfortunate incidents like the Forest Gate arrival of 250 policemen on the doorstep of two houses in the early hours of the morning – major mistake. Also, the shooting of the Brazilian at Stockwell Tube when the police were claiming that he was a suspected terrorist was pretty unfortunate for community relations.

While Leeds is doing its best, the Government does not seem to be pulling its weight on this and I refer you to the report from the Muslim Taskforce set up by the Government after 7/7 last year and I believe Councillor Iqbal in a previous life served on one of the working parties there. Only one of their 64 recommendations have been brought in and they suspect that the rest are being ignored. I will read from one of the representatives there, from the Muslim Council of Britain who said yesterday in the paper:

“When we engage with Government we do so on behalf of our communities and they expect to see the results of our engagement. Because they have not seen any progress, they now feel it is pointless to engage with Government, that Government only uses us so that it looks good. It is becoming exceptionally difficult in terms of our relationship and accountability to our communities.”

I never want that to happen in Leeds and I have confidence in this administration that we will not let that happen with any parts of our community, but that is a warning to all of us and the Government had really better watch out. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR J L CARTER: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. Just on the Area Committees – and thank you for the comments on the Area Committees – we still want more work to go down to there and you will be pleased to know, Ralph, that I have a new lead member, Councillor Mrs Judith Chapman, who has very kindly agreed to look into this matter for me and see what more we can get down. She is working very hard to do that at the present time. That should, I hope, bring more down to the Area Committees.

It is all very well for Java to sit over there and be nice to me today. Can I just tell you, him and his colleague, Alan Taylor, kick hell out of me until I get something for Harehills. They are the toughest cookies you can think of. They are fighting off the same hymn sheet and obviously they are trying to get more things that are proper in Harehills.

If I can just come on to the comments that Richard made, which I was pleased at what he said. Some time ago we were all laughing in this Council Chamber when in Hansard an MP congratulating my Leader and my about various housing matters. The one thing I did say to that particular MP and it is the one area which concerns me most about housing, is we have something in the order or 20,000 back to backs. I do not believe that there is any easy or magic way of dealing with them. Not all of them want knocking down

and Bernard, I think, nodded when that was said, but some of them there is a lot of money required. The money that is required, it is going to take an awful lot of money from Government. We have not got that type of money to do it.

If you think what we do at the present time, we have got the PFI schemes with Swarcliffe, Little London and Boston all being well. We have got the Two Star money which is going to improve a lot of the properties we have already got. We have got EASEL, which is also intended to try and improve housing as well. I still believe in my heart of hearts that we will be short to actually deal with the back to back houses.

It is fascinating the comment which I think Richard made who said that in Birmingham they had waved goodbye to all back to backs. I found that a fascinating comment. I did not know it was true, I did not know that existed and it is something that we should really aspire to.

As Bernard nodded to, you do not need to get rid of them all. We only need to get rid of those that should go and we should really be working hard to get rid of those.

I was delighted when Richard said, we are going to need Government money, we are going to need Government help, we are going to have to have innovative ideas as well if we are going to do this. We cannot just expect Government to pour the money in and we will do it that way. We are going to have to have innovative ideas. It is working together on this and I think there is a good will right round this Council – right the way round this Council – to say, look, what can we do on this? It is a matter which we will be giving a lot of attention to and thank you all, all Members of Council, for the support on that.

I do not think there is anything else we have covered. Thank you very much indeed. (*Applause*)

(vi) Children's Services

THE LORD MAYOR: Moving on to the next item, Children's Services. Councillor Rafique to move an amendment reference back.

COUNCILLOR RAFIQUE: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Lord Mayor, I would like to move a reference back in relation to the review of primary provision in Meanwood Primary Planning Area as contained in Minute 14 of the Executive Board Minutes of 14 June 2006.

Three years ago the Council decided that they did not want to close Miles Hill Primary School later that year, also is to be re-erected Potter Newton Primary School. Assurances were given by the Authority that a further review will not take place for a further five years and during this time the authority would do every thing possible. Guess what? Two years later in 2005 this administration decided to embark upon yet another review of the Meanwood primary provision.

Education Leeds carried out the consultation with the parents and other stakeholders in the area. The meeting with parents attracted over 150 people, which was more than some of the High School consultations. The message from the parents, community, Board members loud and clear was we want

both schools staying open. There was indeed a deputation to full Council on 22nd June last year.

The matter was brought to the Executive Board in September last year when it was decided to look at forming a federation of two schools. Again assurances were given by the Exec Board Member for Learning and his colleagues in private meeting with the parents that the school would remain open.

Since then nothing has been heard by parents or ward members until two weeks ago when out of the blue and straight after the local election a report was submitted to the Executive Board to close Miles Hill for a 1.5 form entry new school on Potter Newton site.

Members of the Council, assurances were obviously worthless and yet again the parents and local community find themselves in this unbearable situation.

The area is one of the most deprived in the city. Both schools feature a high percentage of free school meals and special educational needs. The parents and children deserve a choice to attend a smaller school that understands each individual child's needs. Rural schools are given extra money if numbers are down, so why not inner city schools?

The current schools have been serving the community in other ways, such as wrap-around care, training for parents, our partnership with Headingley Hawks and Sure Start. Until the review last year this was a thriving school and numbers were on the increase. Obviously the review last year has affected the numbers as any parent would be reluctant to choose a school they might think would close.

We strongly believe that the option of having two one form entry schools in the area has not been considered from all angles and this is the best option. Miles Hill Primary is fully sustainable as a one form entry school with both current and predicted numbers. Relocating on to Potter Newton site would take away parental choice and other local schools are full.

This would mean that parents who cannot afford their own private transport will be penalised. The children of Miles Hill have deep roots in the school as many of the parents and older siblings attended the school. In the words of one of the governors, "This school is a family which provides much needed stability in a community where stability is a scarce commodity."

The school has dedicated staff, supportive parents and an experienced governing body as well as (*inaudible*) that meet all the requirements. The financial implications are extremely vague by not listing all potential costs to be incurred during the transitional period. It is my believe that any short-term financial advantage will be far outweighed by long term costs, a loss of benefit to the local community young people by closing this school.

Personally I have never understood why the two areas of Scotthall and Meanwood are in the same group of schools. They are two distinct communities with different issues. The Community cohesion referred to in various reports will be some predicament if the schools were to amalgamate and we do not appear to have consulted with the police and other agencies for their views. In addition as Carr Manor is full, there is no choice – there is no choice – for the parents to send their children there, even if they wanted to.

My colleagues Jane and Sharon and I are all struggling to find a satisfactory reason for why this review has happened so quickly after the last one and within days of the local elections.

Looking at the special edition of the Meanwood Valley, Miles Hill and Beck Hills focus newsletter, which I will come to in a minute, we can only assume that the administration has used delaying tactics and the potential gain to the ballot box has the sense of prolonging the parents' and community's despair. The Focus is a special edition issued just before the local elections and the headline is, "School closure plan stalled". It has got Councillor Lancaster, and I am really baffled how they conned you into this, Brenda. It is not even your ward, yes. It reads:

"Closure-threatened Miles Hill Primary School has been given hope following an intervention by Liberal Democrats.

Education Leeds, the body that runs education on behalf of the Council, has been asked to come up with alternatives to closure.

Local Liberal Democrats campaigner Tim Harberd says, "This is great news!"

This is great news in the ballot box. It is great news for the votes.

"Labour's rules mean that we often have to consider "pupil number" before the wellbeing of the local area.

"The Lib Dems believe the needs of the wider community come first. This is why we have sent the proposed closure back to the drawing board".

It gets worse. Where is the other bit? I cannot find it anywhere. Listen, there is lies and there is blatant lies. There is lies and white lies. This is all of the above. Let me tell you this, this is hypocrisy and double standards of the first degree. (*Applause*)

Members of the Council, I realise admission numbers are an issue across the city and that the Council has to look at the bigger picture. The Children Act talks about the local schools for local children within a walking distance and not having to be bussing them out. It states that children are entitled to attend schools in their own area. Surely while money is important the children are too. We are told that Every Child Matters. Does this include those at Potter Newton and in particular at Miles Hill? My Lord Mayor, I move this reference back.

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. That is a very hard one to follow but I understand and I will try to do it in a calm, measured way and even read properly.

I think the first thing we want to say is that both Potter Newton and Miles Hill are in very deprived areas and have real challenges. We know they have surplus places. We knew last year they had surplus places. I think the argument we advanced last year was that a federation was not right and

appropriate. They needed to be treated as two separate schools actually serving two separate communities with very difficult and very different needs.

Last year we had the same debate in this Chamber and the nub of the argument rested around this, that Miles Hill had surplus places but when you looked at the amount of children from the local community who went there, there is only 20% and you inevitably ask the question, if there is only 20%, why can't we get more, get up to the average of 60%, 50%? That actually helps the community and helps the school.

So, we waited to see what Education Leeds had done, what support had been given from the Executive Board member to make sure that that school first of all had some confidence in the future and had some support to spell out to local parents, this school is still open. Sadly, nothing happened. We had a temporary head and nothing happened.

This argument reminds me a lot of Beckett's Park, because the same thing. It had closure over it year after year and it is inevitable – it is not a great surprise to us that only 20% of the children go because there is no confidence in the future. It was the same arguments about Beckett's Park. There were no alternatives. I challenge anybody. Carr Manor is full, the St Urban Catholic School is full, Meanwood C of E is full. The only one school they will be forced into, which is the reason why we argue separately, would be Potter Newton, so it is not a great surprise.

We have been talking a lot here – I think Richard mentioned it, a number of people have mentioned – about closing the gap. Let me give you a flavour of what we are talking about here. We are talking about a school that has 60% of children on free school meals. We are talking about a neighbourhood that actually has 43% of households on benefit. We are talking about single parents, 34% of them working part-time and 18% working full-time. I do not have to spell it any more. We are talking about one of the most deprived areas in the city.

Now, I will read this, because it is worth reading, and it is written by Councillor Mark Harris. Written last February – not too long ago. Remember, the arguments are exactly now as they were in February, as they were last year. He says this:

“Locally in the last few years three primary schools – Fir Tree, Miles Hill and Potter Newton – have all gone through this review. In spite of the economic case for closure being clear, we have recognised there are overriding factors and considerations.”

There are overriding considerations and all three will remain open. That is what it says. It just means that we have to rob Peter to pay Paul.

Now, I give you this. We are there talking to communities as politicians and, let's face it, there are not many communities that have faith in politicians because they accuse us of making promises and statements that we do not hold to and this is a classic case where a politician has made a statement, has made a commitment, has said we will keep it open and has profoundly let down one of the most deprived communities in the city.

I think the parents and I think the children deserve a lot better. The reason for moving this reference back, Council, is to make sure they get another opportunity to make that school open, vibrant and supported by the local people. I move, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR MULHERIN: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. Once again we see that the threat of closure seems to be becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy with these schools like Beckett's Park having been subjected to repeated review.

As the Headteacher of Potter Newton Primary illustrated in his letter to the Executive Board on 12th June, the school's admissions numbers have been significantly healthier in years where there has been no perceived threat of closure. In that letter the reception intake at Potter Newton plummeted each time the school had been the subject of primary review and, in the eyes of prospective parents, under threat of closure. It is a simple fact, as Councillor Rafique has stated, that most parents are not going to choose to send their children to a school they believe will close the following year with all the upheaval that that entails.

Miles Hill and Potter Newton Primary Schools cater for communities with very high levels of deprivation, as has already been stated. Each school has over 60% of its pupils on free school means. The Potter Newton site is a long walk up a big hill from the estate that the Miles Hill Primary School serves and, given that the other schools in the area are full, those families in the area would be left with no other choice but to make that journey in all weathers if that school is closed.

That same community in the Beck Hill estate has been targeted for additional support by the North-East Leeds District Partnership because of its high levels of deprivation. It is clear that the communities that these two schools serve need additional support and input to close the gap that exists in our two speed city, not the removal of the very hub that that district partnership is relying on to build its community support around.

It is very worrying, then, that the District partnership should be placed in a position where its Chair had to write to the Executive Board almost a year after he offered to work with Education Leeds on this issue stating that that offer had been ignored.

For the benefit of those members who have not seen the letter from the Chair of the Leeds North-East District Partnership, her letter refers to Miles Hill as:

“...the central hub of the local community”

and states that:

“Its loss without due consideration and planning of what takes its place will leave Beck Hill Estate in an extremely vulnerable position.”

Perhaps there is a wider agenda here, as set out in the agenda on managing primary school places that was also put before the Executive Board on 14th June – but then again, if Education Leeds preferred model for primary schools is for them all to be two form entry, they surely would not be putting forward a one-and-a-half form entry primary school as part of the Meanwood Primary Review.

In that same report on managing primary school places, it is clearly stated that the planning of primary school places is relevant to closing the gap and that planning school places needs to take into consideration wider socio-economic factors and regeneration.

If that is the case and the District Partnership's offer to work with Education Leeds and other partners over the last year has not been taken up, as they have stated in their letter, the wider impact of the closures on the Beck Hill Estate in particular cannot have been fully taken into account in making this decision.

With that in mind, I would strongly urge the Council to support Councillor Rafique's call for this decision to be reconsidered. Thank you.
(*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HARKER: My Lord Mayor, I am going to look very carefully at the verbatim minutes of this meeting because I think Councillor Rafique said that I had made a promise to parents. The only time I met with parents I had an officer present and that meeting was minuted and I never make promises I cannot keep. I think I need an apology at the very least. I am not talking on anybody else but myself.

The only thing about this administration that we all share in terms of education is that we want the best quality education for all of our children, no matter what their gender, ethnicity, faith, socio-economic background, ability or special need might be. That has been something I have worked towards over half of my life. I would not do this job if it did not give me the opportunity to do that. All of the children in Leeds deserve the best possible education.

Yes, in September last year I did ask Education Leeds to look again at the proposal they had put before us. I asked them to talk to all the schools in the area about the possibility of federating Potter Newton with one of them and Miles Hill with another. After six months of talking to Heads and Governors, they came back to me and told me, after I came out of hospital, that this could not be done; that the Governors and the Headteachers of the other primary schools were not pleased, did not like the federation idea.

So then again I looked and thought about which of the two schools would have to close and for geographic reasons I had to choose Potter Newton to be the place where we open the new primary school. If you look at the geography of the catchment areas, you will see what I am talking about there. In the interests of the children of Potter Newton who go to Potter Newton School who live at the bottom of their catchment area, they would have to walk further to Miles Hill if we kept the Miles Hill site open.

As to the District Partnership and the work that they are doing, there is no reason why that work should not continue and a venue be found in the area.

I do not take closing schools – despite what Bernard says – lightly, but I do know that there are not the children in the area to keep all of the schools in this planning area subscribed with children. There is a 25% deficit.

When I also looked at some of the other schools in the area, I discovered that a large percentage of their children come from outside the

planning area. I suspect that every five year old – I am not so sure what age they go to the nursery school so I will stick to five – every five year old in the Beck Hills area who applied to go to the Carr Manor Primary School would get in on the principle of distance. There will be choice for parents in the Beck Hills and I have to say that Carr Manor High School is one of the very best primary schools in the city. I do believe that this city is providing choice for the parents still.

I have not done anything for political reasons of the election. If I was that sort of person, I would not have deal with Beckett's Park prior to the election. I want to say to Keith, before I sit down, we already rob Peter to pay Paul in this city. Just look at the education accounts.

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: Recorded vote, please.

THE LORD MAYOR: All in your seats, please.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: My Lord Mayor, I have been asked a question regarding members of the School Organisation Committee and whether they are taking part in this vote. Could we have some clarification, please?

THE CHIEF LEGAL SERVICES OFFICER: No, they are not allowed to take part in the vote.

THE LORD MAYOR: Members of the School Organisation Committee are not allowed to take part in the voting. Clear?

(A recorded vote was taken)

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: The vote is complete.

THE LORD MAYOR: 90 members present taking part in the vote. 38 in favour of the motion, 2 abstentions and against are 49.

(The motion was lost)

THE LORD MAYOR: Shall we carry on with the comments and can I invite Councillor Gruen.

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. Page 130, Minute 13 in the additional papers, but before I refer to that, can I welcome Councillor Brett to his new position. I noted with interest his comments because it is, of course, customary to thank one's predecessor and he did so with unrestrained enthusiasm only when the supplementary came he said there was lots of new work still to be done and lots of early work still to be done.

Councillor Brett, I only have one piece of advice for you. You know when people fall out with your Leader, it is very hard to come back. Even the very talented Councillor Morton is only half way back. Just in case, Councillor Jennings is saving a seat for you just over here. Let us watch this with interest. Councillor Harker, glad to see you back as well. I hope you have made a full recovery. Now to the Minutes, if I may, my Lord Mayor. I have said enough nice things.

We now come to the report that was in front of the Executive Board which I understand Councillor Harker welcomed, said that this was an excellent report and clearly he has had too much time lying on his back in the hospital thinking about these things, because if he thinks that is a report to be welcomed, then we on this side seriously question exactly whose interests he is following – those of the children or those of the institutions.

It is interesting to know that we still think, apparently, in this city, that the one size fits all solution is the best, that two forms of entry schools will be the future template, the future model for this city. I have to tell you that on this side of the Chamber we are not convinced. We are thinking this through very carefully, which is why Councillor Wakefield reserved his position at the Executive Board. It is an important issue and we are not going to react in a fastidious kind of way but we are saying to you there is a lot at stake.

We firmly believe that in primary schools, primary children should be able to walk to their local school and local is often the best. Certainly one of the outcomes is that we want happy children. I cannot think how you are going to have happy children by pushing them on a bus and bus them to a two form entry primary school God knows where. It is a bit like the South Leeds children being bussed now into West Leeds because of the miscalculations in South Leeds.

I know demographics is a difficult thing. After all, I have been carefully involved through the SOC with it for five years, so I know it is difficult to plan, it is difficult to close. I missed the last debate but I am sure you will have debated how difficult it is to close schools and I recognise that, but from our point of view, even having recognised surplus places, we are just not convinced that you have given sufficient thought to this. We are certainly not convinced that you have consulted anybody.

I have done an impromptu ring-round over the weekend with the contacts that we clearly still have and I could not find a governor, a headteacher, a trade union representative or anyone who has been consulted about this paper. It is a fundamental paper, a fundamental change and you have not taken it to any of the fora that I would expect you to take that information to and to get the reaction from.

In our view, 95% or more of the primary schools offer excellent education, an excellent curriculum. Parents are delighted with the education, the extra curricula education, the extended schools through Early Years provision – all those things, wrapped around school, that they get at the present time.

We think there could be – those poor people from Adel who were here earlier on, from Adel School, talking about buildings and mis-buildings, they are on the list as a one-form entry school that might be going nowhere and, of course, I could but I will not at this meeting – as I said, we are giving careful consideration and I am not going to go through the list of 70 or 80 schools that could face closure thanks to this particular paper, but I give you due warning, I put you on notice that our view is that we will not tolerate that kind of initiative which you are putting forward when in our view you are putting children last instead of first. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR MULHERIN: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Two form entry is set out as Education Leeds' favoured model in this report. The

reason for this is that Education Leeds views small schools as uneconomic. In the report they are referred to as a financial drain on resources. These same schools, which make a valuable contribution to and form an intrinsic part of our communities. In the report it is acknowledged that they are not simple economic units. They are referred to in the following terms:

“We think of primary schools as at the heart of their community. They need to be considered, therefore, within their local geographic context, taking into consideration a range of factors including wider socio-economic factors, regeneration activities and equalities.”

Which of these factors will hold sway? Their value to the community? The real difference they are making to children’s lives? The environmental impact of parents ferrying pupils further away to larger schools outside their local community?

The report states that there are 77 schools with fewer than 190 pupils in the Leeds districts. These are the schools that in Leeds are entitled to small school protection funding. Where those 77 schools are located is not spelt out in the report but it would not take too much digging to find out.

With the publication of this report parents, pupils, teachers and governors will all be asking which of these schools are next for the chop.
(Applause)

COUNCILLOR CLEASBY: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I wish to speak to Minute 15 on page 130. Lord Mayor, I would like to put on record mine and my ward colleagues’ admiration for the adult way in which our governing bodies, headteachers, have worked with officers to achieve what seems to be a sensible result for the reduction of places in Horsforth. I know that Councillor Barker is in fact one of the governors of one of the schools mentioned here and so I have learned from him the effort that all the schools have put in. I am aware from my own governorship of the effort that the Chairs of Governors and the Headteachers have put in in the collective meetings in the area, so if I could just close by saying thank you to all those involved for what seems to be a very sensible result from a very difficult situation. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR HARKER: We are about to get a new form of spin, very similar to the sort of spin we had about Roseville earlier and we have had on other occasions the scare tactics of the Labour Group as far as public relations are concerned.

Nowhere in the document in the policy document does it say that one form entries are for the chop. Nowhere. I would not support such a thing. I suggest rather than reading what is perhaps not the best written accompanying document – that is pages 221 to 223 – you instead read the document because it does not sound as though you have read it, to me.
(Applause)

COUNCILLOR BRETT: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I do not need to say a great deal more about the reference back debate except to say that I have worked in a small school and the myth that a small school where relatively speaking there are more teachers, fewer pupils, the immediate

sense is that must be wonderful. My experience is that sometimes that can be pretty dire. Morale of teachers is crucial to the outcomes for children.

I am very sympathetic to the view that a constant review is unsettling. That is why we have taken the decision. It is not easy but the decision has been taken.

On the second item that has been raised, I completely agree with Peter. I want our children to walk to school at primary level. I agree with him that one size does not fit all our circumstances. If think that if we were to read the paper that was passed by Exec Board together we could get a large measure of agreement.

I welcome the remarks from Councillor Cleasby and with that, Lord Mayor, I will sit down. Thank you. (*Applause*)

(viii) Social Care and Health/Adult Social Care and Health

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I now invite James Lewis on Adult Social Care and Health, please.

COUNCILLOR LEWIS: Speaking to Minute 19 on page 132 of the additional documents that we have received, and this refers to the Scrutiny Board's enquiry into childhood obesity.

Brenda Lancaster mentioned many of the statistics, some of them quite shocking that we heard. I do not wish to dwell on those again, but obesity is clearly something that affects people's lives and is clearly part of the massive health and equalities gap we have in this city. Those of us who believe in a fair society know that we have to close this gap.

The enquiry has many, many complex reasons why obesity levels are rising, involving so many different reasons and so many different factors. Within the Council and within Government this brings together so many different departments, so many different sections, so many different officers. We thought it was important that one of the members here who is appointed to the Executive Board, the pinnacle of the Council's decision making structure, should be the person who is the focus for dealing with these issues, dealing with something that is very complicated and we also thought it was important that it was somebody who is not just an officer but somebody who is accountable to us as a Council.

We greatly look forward to the paper that has been promised in the Executive Board Minute and I hope that this time somebody on the Executive Board will be appointed as Obesity Champion to try and deal with these complicated issues and try and pull together all the different pieces of work. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR ILLINGWORTH: The rising incidence of obesity, particularly among children, is a major public health problem in these days. We are starting to see a new disease, Lord Mayor, called MODY. It stands for Maturity Onset Diabetes in the Young. The victims can look forward to serious, life-threatening conditions at an age when they should be looking forward to years of active life.

Lord Mayor, there is a dispute about the cause of childhood obesity but universal agreement that reduced physical activity contributed enormously to the problem. For most children, physical activity means playing out. I am sure every member of this Council remembers what that

was like. A few children will take part in organised sport. Some of them will go to the pool or to the gym, if there is one nearby and if they can afford to pay, but for most kids it is the random, disorganised childhood play which provides the bulk of their exercise.

Lord Mayor, there are in Leeds huge disparities in the opportunities for children's play. On the whole, the richer areas have better play provision but there are pockets of deprivation even in the most prosperous wards. Deprivation, however, is concentrated in the inner city areas. Inner city children have ten times the child road accident rates when compared with the outer suburbs and in part – and only in part – this reflects the lack of safe places to play.

Although there is very limited evidence, what information we do have suggests that childhood obesity may also be more prevalent in deprived areas, possibly – and I stress the word possibly – in areas lacking adequate provision for children to play.

Therefore, Lord Mayor, this is a plea for more research by this Council. We need better information to guide our policy making. We need to identify on a very detailed basis exactly what play provision is available in each local area of our city – not just sports field, Lord Mayor, but the whole range of childhood activities, safe and available close to where our children live. Where provision is inadequate, Lord Mayor, we need to put it right. Thank you.

COUNCILLOR HARRAND: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Thank you for the comments that have been made. I am sorry that I was not here for James's speech. I have been using my time constructively. I have been talking to officers and can confirm now that there are no redundancy notices that have been issued to anybody at Roseville. They are categorically hypothesis. There are letters which I have seen, discussions with the employer which I had not seen previously but no redundancies. If you can show me one I will apologise, as I said earlier.

Obesity and childhood play areas - that is what it was for us, 50 years ago. We would go out. Why don't the parents take responsibility as well? Why don't the parents see their children play out to counter these dangers?

COUNCILLOR: Where do you live? Do you know some of these areas where some of these kids come from?

COUNCILLOR HARRAND: Yes I do and that is why I say the same thing, it is rash to say that parents are responsible for their children. I would not propose that but it used to apply. Thank you very much for your comments. They will all be taken account of (*inaudible*)

(b) Scrutiny Board (Children & Young People).

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Talking to page 97 Minute 132, the Youth Service. Really just to talk a little bit about how the service is operated and what is happening in the Morley area. I think a lot of us had concern about how the Youth Service has operated in the past and on many occasions perhaps did not achieve what we as Board members would want it to achieve. Indeed, on many occasions I think many Board members would agree that it had been somewhat ineffective.

I think we welcome the fact that post-Ofsted the direction we are going in is something that is positive for our young people, certainly in Morley. We are in a situation where we are looking for the Youth Service to look at being more of an enabling partner rather than a providing partner and we can work closely with the voluntary sector and operate in Morley and I am sure operate in other areas to provide more opportunities and more activities for the young people in our area.

There is no doubt at all that in the past we have had situations where the Youth Service has seen itself as operating almost in a vacuum and has not built a decent relationship with those community groups, sports clubs and other organisations that work in that particular area. I am pleased to see that we are beginning to overcome those obstacles and certainly in Morley we have a very useful Morley Youth Network that is looking at ways of building a constant relationship between the voluntary sector and the statutory sector and looking at making sure that we get better value from it.

What we would say is that that seems to be the direction that the Government are going in as well and we would welcome it and we are in a situation where we all hope to achieve greater opportunities for our young people, getting young people off the streets and doing something positive with their time. Thank you, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR BALE: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I am grateful for the opportunity Councillor Finnigan has given me to comment on the work of the Scrutiny in the Youth Service area and to update members generally.

Following the Ofsted inspection of the Youth Service in September 2004, an action plan was drawn up to address the recommendations of the inspection. Progress against the action plan has been monitored by Government office and in turn the Executive Board asked Scrutiny to monitor progress against the action plans.

The report that is referred to in the Minutes is the third and final monitoring report which the Scrutiny Board has received concerning the progress in the Youth Service and on each occasion we have been able to note good progress.

I agree entirely with Councillor Finnigan, that a great deal more needs to be done and this year the Scrutiny Board Children's Services has already identified the Youth Service and the delivery of the Youth Matters Entitlement across Leeds as a subject for one of our major enquiries. A working party has been set up, a working group has been set up, Board members, to determine the scope of the enquiry and I am particularly interested in pursuing a suggestion that Councillor Mulherin has made that we should do some work in which we sample in some innovative way – perhaps a video production or something like that – what young people themselves feel the Youth Service should be doing, as well as looking at the structure of the Youth Services across the city and as part of that I am delighted to look at the work of the Morley Youth Network and I entirely support Councillor Finnigan's comment about the need for the Youth Service to be a partnership service in which those services provided by the City Council itself operate in partnership with the voluntary sector, the churches and a whole range of organisations across the city. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Speaking at page 118, Minute 165. People will remember we raised concerns, certainly I raised concerns about the Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust building some time ago. I think it is one of those things where we can show that all of us have played a constructive role in trying to resolve a problem that faces the people who live in these particular locations.

I am grateful to the Scrutiny Board for Health and Wellbeing. They have had a long slog with this one and I know it has been hard work for them and they have had all sorts of interesting if not on many occasions vibrant characters coming to raise their particular concerns, but this is a matter that I think concerns all parties. All parties have taken an active role in trying to resolve the problems that we face here.

We do perhaps need to recognise that there are often occasions when outside organisations do not believe that we have any relevance, do not believe that we have any influence but ultimately on this occasion and I hope on many other occasions we can show quite clearly that as a result of our interventions, there have been decent, practical changes and ultimately that the people who live in these particular sets of accommodation, who tend to be some of the most vulnerable people within our communities, are safer as a result of our intervention. I think we all deserve some credit for that. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR ELLIOTT: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. I am on page 121, Minute 168. The Morley Borough Independents are pleased that work is being done to tackle childhood obesity in Leeds. We all know that exercise and diet are vital factors in physical wellbeing. It is also well documented that fit and healthy young people are both happier and learn better and that when this is carried through into adulthood, it is likely to result in people living longer.

The Government's recognition of this is reflected in the Every Child Matters policy and we are delighted that this Council recognises and supports this policy. Needless to say, we in Morley will do all we can to support this initiative within our community and, as Councillor Lancaster has asked that we will promise to promote healthier eating in our schools. Thank you.
(Applause)

THE LORD MAYOR: We have used up all the time on Minutes and can I invite Councillor Harris to have the final right of reply.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Yes, Lord Mayor. I thought what Councillor Illingworth had to say was, frankly, spot on and he is quite right. I thought Peter Harrand's reply was reasonable in the circumstances but that then does lead me to my main reply with this intervention, which just does not help the debate at all when somebody shouts out at Peter Harrand, "Do you live in any of these places?" I take the point but I would not have thought that the Primley Parks were particularly deprived, but that is where Brian Selby lives and he represents Seacroft, does he not? I would not have thought Newlay Grove was particularly deprived, so what does Ted Hanley know about deprivation in Bramley? I certainly do not think Maurice Lane looks very deprived.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I thought you lived in China?

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: We may come to that but the point I am making is, it does not inform the debate to make comments like that at all.

The discussion on school closures. Let me just first of all reply to the point that was made about the article I wrote for the YEP. I do not for one second withdraw a single word I wrote in that article. However, as usual things like that are taken completely out of context. What was offered to those schools at Exec Board where we asked for the matter to be looked at again, was federation. That is what we offered, that was their salvation. You yourself, Keith, said in this debate that you do not think federation was the right thing. All I can say to those schools is, that was their salvation. You can lead a horse to water – if they had accepted federation then they were saved but they did not accept federation. That was their choice. You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink.

You lot over there talk as if you were never responsible for closing any schools or that there were every any criteria, difficult ones, for closing schools. Under Education Leeds you were responsible for closing 25 schools – loads and loads of schools – because of the problems of numbers, because of the problems of budget. Exactly the same issues that we have inherited. We supported you time and time again.

I remember, for instance, Leopold. I support the closure of Leopold. I supported – it is not rubbish, it is a fact. Check the facts. The closure at Whyther Park. So, where the criteria were clear as they are here, that is what the paper about managing primary school places is all about.

Now, we then had an interesting discussion on electioneering and election leaflets and Councillor Rafique used the expression, “There are lies and then there are blatant lies.” As I have said previously, the problem with making such references in this Council is that you suppose that only you read things. We also read your leaflets and if you want to talk about lies and blatant lies and the effect it has on the people of Leeds, let us look at a few of them.

What about the leaflet in Harehills that went out to the Gipton Estate saying that the Harehills cemetery extension was exclusively for Muslims. What about that for a leaflet? What about the leaflet that went to predominantly Muslim Harehills that said that the Harehills cemetery extension could not be guaranteed that Muslims would be buried there? What about that for lies and blatant lies? What about City and Hunslet, Lord Mayor, with apologies to you - a letter to residents said that the Liberal Democrat administration had withheld £19m of Decency money. What about that? Where did that come from? What about the suggestions in the leaflets that the then Leader of Council had gone on a £75,000 Mediterranean cruise? What about that for a lie or a blatant lie? What about the suggestion – I will put them in the post to you, Keith – what about the worst of all and this brings me to what was a good point made by Richard Lewis about the question of how are we going to deal with all the back to backs, how are we going to deal with the renovation of houses not in Council ownership where we are not going to get PFI money, where we have not got Decency money?

Of course, in response to that, although it does not cover the whole city, Les Carter and Javaid Akhtar made reference to EASEL, a means of regenerating a huge swathe of housing using our land, our muscle and private money. Not one penny of central Government’s money. Done entirely within this city. What about then the leaflet that was put out in East Leeds

that said that EASEL was a means by which the Council was going to sell Council houses and Council land and use the money for other projects elsewhere in the city? What about that for a lie or a blatant lie?

So be careful when you make these references in Council and remember not just the harm and damage that you do to the ordinary people living in this city, but remember as well the effect it can have on inward investment, much needed inward investment. *(Applause)*

What do you think private sector partners are going to think if they think there is the slightest chance of you rabble ever getting back again and all those projects are under threat? So be careful about the damage you do not just to ordinary people but to this entire city by the loose use of your tongues. *(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I now call on a vote on the receipt of the Minutes. All those in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The Minutes were carried)

THE LORD MAYOR: OK, Members of the Council, we shall adjourn for tea break and I would like to invite the members of the public as well. Today the tea is arranged in the Members' Lounge because there is some booking of the banqueting hall.

The Council Meeting was adjourned for a short time

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you Members of Council. Welcome back members of the Council and members of the public. We will now start with the White Paper Motions. Number 10, White Paper Motion, Post Office Closures. Councillor Andrew Carter.

ITEM 10 – WHITE PAPER MOTION – POST OFFICE CLOSURES

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. I tabled this White Paper some time ago so members should be extremely familiar with the wording. The sample facts are these, that this Government has presided over the closure of 2,500 urban post offices. They called it the Network Reinvention Programme – yet another euphemism for cuts and closures.

They have been closed not just in rural areas, and I think that sometimes some people think it is an attack on the rural communities and the closing of facilities in villages. In fact it goes a lot further than that because I do not think there is a constituency in the city of Leeds where there has not been a whole string of post office closures. Certainly it is true in Pudsey, across the whole constituency. In my own ward there has certainly been three closures.

I have noticed over the past four, five years, our Members of Parliament, as usual vigorously campaigning for these post offices to remain open. That has usually resulted in the subsequent closure, like so many other things they campaign for. The trouble is, they do not seem to have any clout when it comes to Whitehall, because it is the Government and the Government's policy on reinventing the network that is bringing about these closures.

Now, many thousands more post offices are under threat. There is no question. There are still 15,000 post offices across the UK and they are much more than just post offices. They are parts of communities. It seems to me sometimes that the Government are the experts at knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing, because they are now turning the screws on local authorities because the Audit Commission are now busy writing to us and to other local authorities telling us all how direct debit is the way to go to save money. It is all part of the insidious campaign to get rid of sub-post offices.

Clearly it is a political issue because the Government is behind it but I hope it is not too much of a political issue that members opposite can support us, because they must be under the same pressure from their constituents that we are under.

I notice, Councillor Finnigan, some of the comments that your Member of Parliament has made about saving post offices in Morley and Rothwell, as it is now, but Morley. Then I read with interest the list that had actually closed during the time he has been running his campaign. It is quite frightening.

What concerns me above all is that in this Council we are investing millions of pounds in regenerating our small town and district centres. Simultaneously we are looking at other ways of encouraging the local economies in these communities, whether they are inner city, fringe of city centre or whether the wider urban area. At the same time we are doing that, there is this pincer movement coming from the Audit Commission, the Post Office, but above all pushed by a Government agenda to close these post offices down. When the post office goes it is often the shop that goes as well.

I have already written to the Chief Executive and asked that officers of the Council look at what we can do to support these post offices. It is not made any easier when the Audit Commission writes to you and tells you that you should be buying into the Government agenda purely on the basis of cost, and that is all it is. We have to do something, because the strength of Leeds is not only the diverse communities in terms of their origins, but the diverse communities in terms of settlements, in terms of the villages and the small towns all around the city and integral to the future prosperity of those communities is the local post office.

We all know times move on and I am not pretending we are back 40 years ago and that small post offices can exist as they existed then. Yes, of course they have to diversify but they have to be helped to diversify because these people running small businesses are not only faced with the threat of closure and the withdrawal of business – they are also now facing a mountain of red tape, in common with a lot of other small businesses that need to diversify. They are so busy filling in forms and dealing with bureaucracy, they have hardly got the time to think about how they expand and diversify the business. I do think that the Local Authority has a responsibility not only to individuals but to businesses that contribute to the greater good of the city.

I hope that we can join together in this resolution. Above all, we need the Government to suspend the implementation of the scrapping of the post office card account, because that is due in four years' time and the pressure from the Government departments and the civil servants in letters to pensioners, it is there all the time. If you are 70-odd years old and you like

to go down to the local shop, the local post office, you do not want that sort of pressure and you should not have to put up with that sort of pressure.

We as an Authority need to do a great deal more. I have to say, it is no good any longer our Members of Parliament paying lip service to supporting local communities. It is really time that your seven Labour MPs started to carry corn. There is too much shrugging of the shoulders – “Oh, is that what is really happening? We do not agree with that”, they say to their constituents, and vote for it in Parliament. They have to be a lot more than overpaid extra Councillors. They are there to represent their constituents in Parliament and they are singularly failing to do it if they allow this sort of pressure, this sort of secretive legislation.

Do not think it is the only one because the next one that is coming up is on the local chemists. The Secretary of State who was at that stage Patricia Hewitt, now moved, did a little soft shoe shuffle before the General Election and pushed it into the long grass, but it is coming back again. It is coming back again. Of course, as we all know, when Randal has finished sorting them out there will be no long grass here for them to push it into!

That is what is happening. We are not just going to have post offices under threat, we are going to have local chemists under threat as well. Our Members of Parliament twelve months ago were busy petitioning round, “We are going to save you”. There is going to be a very rude awakening coming and if we are not prepared to defend our local communities in this Council, then you have to question what we are supposed to be here for. It is up to us to make sure that our local communities keep the facilities that they need and these facilities are common across all parts of the city – all parts of the city. There is no difference. There are small sub-post offices in the inner city and the outskirts, in the far flung leafy suburbs of Wetherby, John – everybody is in the same boat. All those sub-post offices are under threat. You have only got to go and talk with the people who are running them.

I hope – and I suspect – this will be passed, but I am looking directly at the opposition party whose party is the party of Government, because do not think we are going to let you get away with or put our hands up, that is a bit embarrassing. We expect some pressure on these people in Parliament to get something done for the people of Leeds, because over the past few years they have done precious little. I move the resolution. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: Thank you, my Lord Mayor. I was not surprised when I heard about the proposed date of 2010 for the withdrawal of the post office card account. It is funny that the Government neglected to mention this intention when they started withdrawing benefit books. The Government knew it could not get away politically with forcing people to move from benefit books straight to high street banks, so it devised a crafty scheme to force people to use a card and pin and then to ask why anyone could not switch to a high street bank.

So, it is with this underhand tactic that they have gone about getting through their plans and now we are faced with some serious problems. The post office card account has not been unpopular and over four million people opted for this when faced with the choice of using a high street bank or a post office. Often this will have been because there was no local bank branch they could get to. Banks tend to be much less accessible than our current post office network. Many people would also have had no choice because they would not have been made welcome by banks because of either their

personal circumstances or their history of banking. To think that banks will simply take on people with these issues is completely unrealistic. I used to work myself in a bank in the mid 1990s when high street banks decided that they did not want (*interruption*) Mick, I am not going to enter into a battle of wits with you - I was going to say with an unarmed opponent.

I used to work in the 1990s in a high street bank and many other high street banks decided they did not want unprofitable customers. These are the customers who kept their accounts with a small amount in credit, usually a few pence, and paid in their wages every week and took them out in cash over the counter. The bank saw that these were customers to whom they could not sell credit cards, bank loans or mortgages. Banks are businesses, after all, and not charities. They went out and they closed their accounts.

The Government says not to worry. By withdrawing the card account the Government removes the main source of transactions for post offices. This completely undermines the viability of running a post office as a business. The Government says not to worry because it will modernise the network with £30m. With 15,000 post office branches, this will not go very far at all.

I am also very frightened as well when New Labour mentions modernisation. This translates to closure in the New Labour dictionary of jargon. Remember, Labour modernisation of the post office network has so far closed over 2,500 branches. Labour modernisation of NHS dental contracts has left many Leeds residents without a dentist. Labour modernisation of Job Centre Plus has closed all bar a handful of Job Centres in Leeds.

So what happens after 2010? Without the attraction of the post office people will no longer visit the local shopping area and other businesses will fail, until the local shopping area no longer provides enough services for people to warrant going there at all and the results, boarded up shopping areas. For those without cars they are faced with serious problems and if people think that the local high street banks will stay in deserted shopping centres, they are sorely mistaken. Just look at how the banks pulled out of Harehills because there was not enough money in it.

A motion condemning the Government over 3,000 post office closures was tabled in the Commons in January 2004 but Leeds Labour MPs Colin Burgin, Paul Truswell and Fabian Hamilton voted against the motion. Instead, they supported a sycophantic motion praising the Government on its successful modernisation of the postal network. That word again.

So, what was doubly galling, though, was seeing Fabian Hamilton boasting that he had delivered a petition to Parliament two months later against the closure of two post offices in Old Woodley. More recently, Fabian has signed an Early Day Motion against the phasing out of the post office card account in 2010. Sounds promising, but on his record one can only speculate which way he will go if it comes to a vote.

We have all got to put pressure on the Government not to cancel post office card accounts in 2010, but instead to support post offices in developing their businesses. I think it should also be noted there will always be people for whom high street banking can never be an option.

On a final note, all of this has left me wondering. What is the difference between a Leeds Labour MP and a Leeds post office? One is hopelessly stuck in the 1970s, hardly manages to deliver anything in Leeds and at this rate will definitely not be here in four years' time and, of course, the other is a post office. Thank you. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HANLEY: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Lord Mayor, a long afternoon and I do not intend to dwell very long on this because in broad terms we do agree. We need to support the post offices and we, of course, will lobby our Labour MPs. We appreciate you cannot lobby your MPs in Leeds because you have not got any.

We do care about the post offices and I have to say that we too, many of us, share the concern that if the account is closed in 2010 this may well create many difficulties.

Of course, what we have also got to accept, Andrew, is that in this ever changing world that we all live in, the major changes in communications, in telephones, mobiles, texts, e-mails, internet banking – we have to adjust to the scenarios that we face. I agree we have to make the shops profitable. I also accept that the post offices are not just a service for people and often elderly and vulnerable people, but they are part of a community and we should work together and try and sustain them.

I am delighted to be able to tell you – which is something I am sure you do know – that since 1997 the Labour Government has invested no less than £2b in the post office network. I think that is a substantial sum of money. At the moment we are spending something like £150m per year on trying to protect the account that you refer to.

It has been reported recently that there has been no rural closures of post offices other than where we cannot find people to take the businesses on. A major problem. It is something that we have to work on.

As I have said, I know other colleagues are going to comment on particular things but I think when you do get something wrong or perhaps you do something and you materially affect another business you should perhaps own up, and I have to say that this Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, are responsible for taking work away from post offices. What they have done, of course, is created 2.3m jobs so we do not send out 2.3m giro's which we sent out every fortnight – more than a million a week, more than 200,000 a day. We do not have to do it.

Of course, the other thing there is that these people do not need the giro's because they have got jobs, so they pay their tax, they pay the insurance and that is what builds the schools, the hospitals and gives Les all of the money to bring our Council houses up to a Decency standard.

So yes, we will support this and we will lobby our MPs. Thank you. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: Lord Mayor, in the famous words of Barry Anderson this afternoon, I will be brief. You know what 'brief' in Barry Anderson-speak means!

I want to pick out one sentence in Andrew's White Paper, which is, "This Council believes that the post office network provides vital services to local communities in both urban and rural areas." So, I spent Saturday

morning going round some of the post offices in my ward to seek out exactly what they did. I tell you, I was surprised by how many elderly people came in and paid £5 here and £10 there because I do represent with my colleagues here one of the more deprived areas of the city and it gives them the opportunity, going in the post office, to pay not all at once but to pay a bit off each week.

I think that is a fantastic way and a responsible way for them to actually keep on track and doing things in that way. For that, if no other reason – but there are plenty of other reasons – I support this motion. I do agree with Andrew that we need to lobby our MPs as well and clearly I do not know any MP in Leeds who has not opposed the closure of post offices in their own constituencies and I have not known any ward members who have not opposed, etc. It is the kind of thing we all do because we do. I think it is right to oppose them because they are a bit like schools, as somebody said, they are the lifeblood of their community and they do much more than just provide a service. They are part of the fabric of the community and a social gathering place and they are well worth supporting. I will do that when it comes to the vote, Andrew.

COUNCILLOR McKENNA: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I am delighted to be able to tell Andrew that my MP, John Battle from West Leeds, has stood shoulder to shoulder with Alison and Java and myself in preventing the closure of Armley Post Office. We dug out some agreement that the Co-op – I am sad to say the Co-op – had agreed they were going to continue this very necessary service in the heart of Armley. It has been said before about the economic heart and I will not repeat it. We managed to persuade them that they had a legal obligation to stay in there and continue as a service.

If anybody has any doubt about how important it is to people in our communities, particularly the old people, then I invite you to go to the post office in Armley on a Monday morning. Remember at half-past nine they used to wait for the post office to open to get their pensions and they would queue up and they would chat to each other and they would re-establish their friendships and their life experience. They still do that but they do not queue up for their pensions. They queue up for what Peter has said, to put some stamps on their licence for the TV licence and save for the holidays.

Largely these people do not have bank accounts, which has been said. Traditionally many of them have never had a bank account. They have very much managed from week to week. As young women and young men they were used to paying the insurance man on the door on Friday night and the milkman and the bread man and the coalman, so they would get their wages and they would be disposed in that way and they never acquired the banking habit.

John, again Alison and myself had tried to counter that by helping to establish Armley Credit Union, which again is in the heart of Armley and we were able to support it and thankfully with inner area money. Please do not be in any doubt about John. John Battle, and I am sure many of the others ones, have done the job. They have fought for the community as we did.

Andrew, I agree with everything that you said and again I do not want to repeat anything but I have to tell you, the Co-op have written to us again and told us they are losing money hand over fist and they still intend to close it. In fact, Armley Post Office may not be here by 2010. If you were to visit

Armley Post Office any time – I am not suggesting you go when it is busy on a Monday morning but if you go any time, it is a main post office, it deals with all the things – passports, renewal of vehicle licensing, savings and it has also got a very thriving pharmacy next to it where people will cash in their prescriptions from the new wonderful lift that we have on Armley Town Street.

All I can say is, and it really worries me, if Armley Post office is under threat because it is not viable, God help those post offices in Adel and some of those villages. Armley is a town in its own right. If you took the number of people living in Armley, it is like some of these towns you read about in the Home Counties. If we cannot be viable and the Co-op which has, I supposed – and I wish they had a bit more social responsibility and social engagement – if they are not willing to continue in Armley, then really we have to be united on this one and we have to do something about it, because if we lose our post offices I think it is going to alienate an awful lot of people from financial dealings and will do nothing to deliver our programme regarding closing the gap.

Lord Mayor, I thank Councillor Carter for bringing this resolution because it does gave us the opportunity to be unanimous and to take action together on this and I hope that is what comes from it. Thank you.
(*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR McARDLE: Lord Mayor, I think this is the third time in my two years in this Chamber that there has been a motion regarding post office closures. I think from memory it was Councillor Finnigan and Councillor Blackburn and now Councillor Carter.

This has been out and out stealth by Government. First of all they peddled the lie that you had to have your pension allowance, benefit, paid into a bank. That was a lie. You could still use the post office and the post office card.

I think Councillor McKenna has already alluded to credit unions and 35% of all people in Leeds are not eligible to have a bank account. The banks will not touch them, so the post office is an absolute lifeline for these people.

It is also a lifeline because the post office is part of the community. It is also a part of the local economy and Councillor Andrew Carter has already alluded to the fact that some post offices actually double up as shops, convenience stores, etc, so it is a lifeline for lots of communities.

I shall be supporting this motion. I will be absolutely astounded if somebody votes against this and it is worthwhile we should lambaste our MPs or whatever to ensure that these post offices remain open. They are an absolute lifeline for many communities. Thank you.

COUNCILLOR CASTLE: I wish to speak in support of the motion. In 2003 Urban Reinvention was agreed and 3,000 urban post offices were closed to create a bigger, brighter future for those that remained. I am sure that if you were to ask any of those remaining post offices if the future was bigger and brighter, many would disagree and many are continuing to struggle.

Now the rural network is about to go through the same process and the people who live in the villages within my ward, especially the older people, are extremely worried and they certainly should be worried. I have here a copy of a letter from James Plaskett MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, in reply to concerns expressed by a resident in Shadwell about the future of the Shadwell Post office. The letter is full of New Labour spin – the same New Labour spin that we have just heard from Councillor Hanley - about them spending money on subsidies to keep the rural post office network open when the fact is that the Government would not need to be subsidising the post office network had it not removed so much of its business.

First, there was the current Government's decision to withdraw the pension allowance book – a payment mechanism for which well over half of benefit recipients opted and which provided the post office with a third of its business.

Then, there was the announcement in the House of Lords earlier this year that the post office card account will be withdrawn in 2010. Mr Plaskett makes the point in his letter that there are 25 other bank accounts that can be accessed at the post office. Quite frankly, this statement means absolutely nothing to many of my constituents. Out of the 25 accounts which Mr Plaskett refers to, 17 are what is known as basic bank accounts. These are the accounts that the Government forced the banks to provide to promote greater financial inclusion for those who would not otherwise be able to obtain a bank account.

The banks are quite open in the fact that they are not interested in promoting these types of accounts, as there is no money to be made from them. In research carried out by the Citizens' Advice Bureau at the beginning of this year, many people stated that it was exceptionally difficult to open this type of account. In recent weeks there has been the news that after 60 years the post office will cease to handle TV licensing work from July. Not everyone feels comfortable with direct debits and I have received complaints at my Barrack surgeries from constituents who have been told that after July if they are not prepared to take out a direct debit in order to pay for their TV licence, they will have to travel to Garforth to buy one – not far away as the crow flies but there is no direct access by public transport between the two locations.

There has been the introduction of on-line vehicle licensing and the news that in future the passport agency intends to take work away from the post office network, added to which there are rumours that BT are to end their contract for telephone bill payments at the end of this year.

With post offices traditionally being paid for the volume of transactions carried out, all of these blows are eroding the income of each individual post office branch. The Government will make their announcement later in the year about the future of rural post offices. Only one in ten rural post offices are profitable and, although it is often argued that they provide an important social service which is of more value than profit, I fear the present Government fails to understand this value.

Unless action is taken now, the future will consist of many villages receiving a part-time service one morning a week in their village hall, or perhaps from a mobile van. Much of the rural post office network will vanish and with it will go many village shops and associated businesses.

Hopefully this debate and other debates being carried out within local Councils up and down the country will seek to minimise the potential damage to the post office network and I urge you all to support the motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR FOX: My Lord Mayor, five weeks ago to this very day my ward had four post offices in it. By lunchtime five weeks ago it was down to three. It was down to three because one of them, that at Bramhope, was closed summarily by Royal Mail due to what they call an internal investigation.

I cannot comment on the circumstances of that, but I can go from that to talk about some of the consequences of this. It does shed light on more than just the Government. It sheds light on the attitude of Post Office Counters/Royal Mail. It is not clear to me exactly whether Royal Mail are driving this or the Government or both, but the one tends to rely on the other.

When the post office was closed, an A4 piece of paper was put up saying, "It is closed temporarily", it said. It has not re-opened, "due to internal investigations. You can go to Adel post office", which has just been mentioned, "you can go to Poole post office or you can go to Otley." That was the message. No contact address, no contact telephone number and it took me 24 hours to actually home in on a telephone number because I happened to be going into central Leeds and I saw a complaints phone line.

I eventually got through to somebody and they told me, "You must contact So- and-So." I said, "Give me the number, I will ring them" and the response was, "Do not ring them, they do not answer the phone. You can only write and if you write you might get an answer in ten days."

This has been the consequence. I have a community with 4,000 people in in 20% of my ward, geographically isolated, which has no post office. It means the pensioners cannot draw their cash, people cannot draw benefits, they cannot buy stamps, they cannot license the car.

Post Office Counters aid, "Go to Adel." That is all right if you have a car, if you can park it. It is a seven mile return journey. It said, "Go to Poole post office" which you cannot access by bus directly. It says, "Go to Otley post office", which effectively means half a day. For most people from Bramhope, if they rely on public transport, it is half a day. It is either the whole morning gone or the whole afternoon gone. That was it, that was the attitude.

The general impression is that once a post office closes for whatever reason, the chances of its reopening are very slight indeed. I am reminded, Lord Mayor, that the Government quite rightly has at the heart of its planning policy sustainable development, PPS1, which stresses the need for sustainable development – effectively people living in places that are not reliant on cars.

The loss of a post office in a place like Bramhope is a classic example of driving people into the car to actually get a basic service. As other members have said, it goes worse than that because this particular post office is on a parade of shops of which there are six. It was one of two retail operations there. There is now one left and Councillor Andrew Carter hit the nail on the head – the one remaining retail element is the chemist's shop.

The effect on the footfall on a parade of shops of the loss of either a post office or a chemist's shop is absolutely enormous in any community like that.

My Lord Mayor, I make no excuses for being parochial, referring to a particular post office, but it has brought home to me and to my community the vital role that a post office plays and I hope that today we will all join in supporting this motion because it is very key to the way that we operate. Thank you, my Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR BLACKBURN: Lord Mayor, it seems to be the perennial problem. I will not say it is like grass cutting, because Councillor Carter got himself into trouble, but it does. Ever since I have been on the Council – I am in my ninth year on the Council - time and again this has come up regarding post offices.

I will pick up on what Councillor McKenna said. Basically, if you do not use a post office and you use a bank, the nearest alternative in my ward is in Armley Town Street and Armley Town Street has lost banks and has lost building societies, so if you are in a built up area – Bramley is the same, Pudsey is the same – we are losing those facilities as well as losing the post offices and we are in communities where we have no town centres. Losing this is ridiculous.

I will just give you a little tale about Old Farnley post office which was shut down about two years ago. We took part in the consultation process, had a meeting up in my office with the Area Manager from Leeds West, who gave us a lot of help. We put a very, very strong argument for this. I will tell you, when it comes to consultations, all right, do your petitions and then, but do not have a meeting with them because it is a waste of time. I have never, ever come across anything that was so much like talking to a brick wall, because it did not sink in at all.

So, I have got to say this, when we got this post office card thing, it really was seen as a sort of panacea to save the post office and allow pensioners to get their pensions there. We as an Authority have put in ability to pay rents and pay Council tax at post offices to keep them going. We have supported them.

Basically, what we are allowing to happen is destroying our communities. We talk a lot about closing the gap. This is something that does close the gap. This is something that is effective and in those communities that cannot afford to go long distances to a bank or have not got telephone accounts and things like that in banks, what we have got to do is we have got to maintain these post offices.

I would like to support this. I hope we all do. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Two brief comments, Lord Mayor. The first is, I believe that Moortown still has more than one post office, which is sometimes hard to understand how that is sustainable so it is always a worry for the future or what is going to happen and one of, now that I am taking responsibility for narrowing the gap, one of the issues we are trying to get to grips with very early on is this whole question of financial red lining and the way in which certain groups of people – and it does not always simply apply to obvious areas of deprivation but certain groups of people are excluded

from the more modern aspects of financial arrangement and facilities. Of course, the whole issue about the post office, the traditional post office, is that it cuts across that particular problem. That is why trying to protect what is left of the network is so critical.

My other comment, which I do find it somewhat bemusing to hear these comments about the Labour MPs and the way in which they can be depended upon to stand there shoulder to shoulder, I think the expression was, on the barricade and protect the post office network system when, as has been pointed out, their voting record is somewhat equivocal on a whole range of issues and yet then when it comes to their public position, they have a habit of not necessarily doing what they have voted for.

However, I do accept that whilst there are seven Labour MPs and only one Lib Dem MP in Leeds, and no Conservatives, I have to make the point that lobbying a non-existent Tory MP is undoubtedly more fruitful than lobbying the seven Labour ones. (*Laughter and applause*)

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Lord Mayor, during these debates about the post office people would expect me to rant on and say something unpleasant about Colin Challon. I am not going to disappoint you but that comes later.

If we can deal specifically and I will perhaps tell you a little tale about Morley. People may know Howden Clough Road post office closed in Morley. Fountain Street post office closed in Morley and Cherwell post office closed in Morley. On the week after the closure of Cherwell, the Postmaster invited the community in to have a look around his house and just say, "Goodbye, we are no longer going to be able to run a business at this particular location." After all is said and done, and we had done all the campaigning, we had written the letters and we had got the same sort of approach in terms of the consultation process that David gets, and you are working through the processes, and you basically at that point are cutting out all the bull. You have an open conversation about what went wrong. Why are you in the situation that you are actually in at this particular point?

They were quite clear about it. They are saying the big issues that basically killed off Cherwell post office is the change from paying benefits on order books to being paid into a bank account. One of the big major issues, they used to make money at that particular point, they were a thriving post office and at the point this Government started to push that change, things started to go wrong and that started to accelerate.

People will know about working tax credit and the tax credit situation at this particular point and most people will know that its predecessor, Working Family Tax Credit, was paid on an order book. When the new tax credits were brought in, you were not given a choice. You were not given a choice. You were not allowed to have that paid via an order book in any way, shape or form. Again, that added to the problems and the difficulties that they faced.

When it came to the straight, ordinary economics, they were absolutely clear about it. The reason that Cherwell post office ended up closed in the way that it was was this change of emphasis that the Government had from paying benefits not on order books where people used to build up a relationship with the Postmaster, used to go in there and get all

the other things and support a fairly small business – cards and all those other things like post offices invariably do.

We were chatting about this and saying what about the future? Are they going to offer us any other opportunities? They said Mr Challon has assured us that, although it has closed down, at this point he is working hard to open a new post office in the Cherwell area and guarantee that within 52 weeks, within a year, there would be another alternative in the Cherwell area. He gave that pledge in April 2005. Can I just tell you at this particular point there is no sign of a post office.

It is important to reflect on this whole post office card account. Those that are hanging on – and they are hanging on with difficulties and doing all the things that the Government want them to do, try and diversify and all those other sorts of issues – a great piece of their income comes from supporting the post office card accounts. There is no doubt whatsoever about it. We do need something more than soft words. We do need to make sure that this particular policy is overturned, because if it is not, then we will all be sitting here in 2010 and there will probably only be one post office left in the whole of the Leeds area and even that will be facing closure.

This policy needs to be reversed. We need to make sure that our MPs are absolutely clear and absolutely firm on this one. If it is not reversed, we will end up with closure after closure after closure. Thank you, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR BALE: Lord Mayor, I would like to refer to the relevance of this motion to a particularly vulnerable section of the community, people with learning disabilities. At a time when we are taking further steps towards the integration of people with learning disabilities into the community through the Independent Living Project, it is all the more important that we create resources at community level, local resources that are going to support integration.

This is very much about confidence. Many people, vulnerable people, people with disabilities, elderly people, have got used to using the card accounts. It took them a long time but they have got used to using the card accounts. Now they are told and they are told over the counter by the local Postmaster that the card account is going to be withdrawn. It feels like death by a thousand cuts. It is death to communities. I do think it is essential as a Council that we recognise in relation to people with learning disabilities who are beginning through progress in healthcare to achieve more or less normal life expectancy, that in many cases to suffer the premature onset of dementia and the rest of us living to ripe old ages, we hope, and suffering dementia as a result of that, more and more people at local level need the support of a local community.

This Government with its centralising tendency, with its creation of a climate which is hostile to small business, has not helped and is not helping. I do believe that rather than – and I am scoring party political points now, but rather than scoring party political points, we should recognise the importance of confidence.

I go back to where I started. People with learning disabilities were referred to earlier in relation to Roseville. We do those people no credit at all if we damage their confidence by telling them that things are being withdrawn, that jobs are disappearing when that is not happening. It is

essential, I believe, that we find cross party support in this chamber for sustainable communities at local level that support all members of the community, particularly the most vulnerable. Thank you, Lord Mayor.
(Applause)

COUNCILLOR AKHTAR: I was just saying this outside, my Lord Mayor, that some of us learn things very quickly but my colleagues opposite have not learned the skills of the opposition yet other than shouting.

The closure of post offices is one of the great scandals of the New Labour Government. I am sure everyone here realises the importance of the post office to our local communities. They are lifeblood of communities in both rural and urban areas, particularly when you combine them with the other services, such as local shops. When the local post office closes the other services follow suit, which can have several knock- on effects on to the communities.

They are often fundamental social hubs to the local communities, particularly for the elderly residents, many of whom find it is vital sources for the social contact. Labour seems determined to beat this highly valued local service into the ground. The withdrawal of post office card accounts is not their only recent damaging policy change. In addition they have opened new network for the independent post offices, depriving local post offices of this important revenue stream, gone back on their promises to retain the rural post office services and since they came into power, Labour have closed 4,000 post offices nationwide. The likely outcome of the Government policy is that the figure will eventually top 10,000 post offices to be closed.

Across the city 49 post offices have been closed since the start of the decade – more than a quarter of the total. In my own ward Gipton and Harehills alone we have lost the post offices on Brundell Road, the Gipton Estate and the Dorset post office on Harehills Lane. These services have been missed by the local residents, essential services.

You try telling these people, we have talked about closing the gap, the assault on the essential community services has gone on too long. We need to send a clear message of opposition to the Labour Government's proposals. This motion does that and I urge everyone to support this motion.
(Applause)

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: My Lord Mayor, I need to be fairly careful because I would not like to be accused of painting Councillor Gruen in a good light in comparison with his successor as Labour Chief Whip. Poor old Ted – the last Blairite standing. Has nobody told him on your side, you do not praise Blair any more? I think somebody really should.

I have to say, everybody who has spoken in this debate – with the exception of Ted – has said something which was constructive and in support of what the motion is seeking to do. Ted is off in a world of his own.

My Lord Mayor, the problem with what is happening to the post offices goes far deeper than just the post offices. It is, as other speakers have said, the whole sustainability agenda. What is the point of deliberately devising a policy that closes down services and drives people on to non-existent public transport, so therefore into their own cars, to have to travel further to do the same piece of business? It makes no sense whatever. It is a

classic example not of joined up Government but of Government that does not talk to any different part of its own organisation. It is nonsensical.

John Bale made, in my view, an exceptionally important point and that is about the new living accommodation that we are providing for people with learning disabilities all around the city. Those people are going to need these local services as much if not more than many other people.

Jim McKenna mentioned Armley Town Street, an area which in a completely non-political way we are all determined to see invested in and built up. It will be a devastating blow to the regeneration of Armley if the post office goes and I am sorry to say, Ted, that I watched everybody's faces when you were talking about the role of the MPs. You certainly look at the world, if you do not mind me saying, through rose coloured spectacles – New Labour rose coloured spectacles – because they all know that the MPs have paid nothing but lip service to the saving of the post offices.

I was staggered – I am doing your job for you here, Robert, but I was staggered when I was looking at the press cuttings, because this is a classic piece of New Labour spin. On 11 February 2005, three months before the General Election, Colin Challon - “MP wins no more post office closures vow from the Post Office.” Presumably that means Morley. If it meant everywhere in the country they have closed hundreds since then, but actually they have closed another one in Morley since then which, as you rightly say, was supposed to be temporary.

I have to tell you, the MPs, the seven Labour MPs, do not carry corn. It is as simple as that. The days are gone – and you can give them this message from me – when they are going to be allowed to go down to Whitehall and vote for tax increase after tax increase, cut after cut, wasted expenditure after piece of wasted expenditure, and come back here and lie to the people of Leeds and say they did not do it, they did not understand it and they are campaigning against it. (*Applause*)

You can tell them from me that the days are done when they are going to get away with that any more. We expect our Members of Parliament to speak up for this city, speak up for the people and start campaigning properly on issues like this. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I call for a vote on this motion? All in favour? Any against? Any abstentions?

(The motion was carried unanimously)

THE LORD MAYOR: Very good, I hope we can maintain this unity! (*Laughter*)

ITEM 11 – WHITE PAPER\MOTION – GRASS CUTTING SERVICES

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: Lord Mayor, I am under pressure to make this very short because people are still living in hope that they can get the second half of the game between Argentina and Holland. If you vote for this and the rest, we will go home! There's a challenge. We will all watch it on Millennium Square.

There is a saying about history repeating itself. Once there is a tragedy and the second is a farce except, I think, this time round it was more

of a farce last year. I remember the kind of jokes that we had in this room, saying who had got the longest grass, who had got the highest, who had lost the most old-age pensioners in the grass and so on. Do you remember that?

It is not even twelve months ago now where we had got, I think, probably a worse situation. We have now got a number of things. The massacre of the crocuses, do you remember that? We had the invasions of the dandelions absolutely everywhere in this city and people complaining about dandelions - I have never seen that – as well as the longest grass. It has actually got worse. We are now the laughing stock of the region. I saw letters from Scarborough complaining and mocking Leeds City Council.

Do you remember last year when we were in there and we had all these statements, what we were going to do? We have heard a bit of it today. Let me remind Councillor Steve Smith. By the way, he has got promoted for this – Deputy Leader now. It is a wonderful party that, you know. This lad got Deputy Leader's job for doing this.

Listen to this – Councillor Smith: “The decision to tender was correct. Leeds residents deserve a better standard of grass cutting than the have had in the past years. The situation will improve as more cuts are done and I am confident that the end result will be a much improved service.” This is June last year. We have actually seen worse.

We had another statement. Mark Harris, always quotable. He does like his quotes and you can always guarantee there is something from Mark coming up which you can use twelve months later. He says, 22nd June, nearly a year ago tomorrow, “There are issues here.” That is quite profound, isn't it? “And lessons which have to be learned.” Good stuff, Mark. “I suspect we will have got the grass cutting under control a long time before we have fixed this other broken wagon of the previous Labour administration.” Complete joke. It is actually worse.

I give you the last one from Les. Let me quote Les Carter. There was a letter in the paper the other day from somebody called Jones, Hetton Road, who said – do you remember it - the Leader of the Council, blaming Les Carter. The Leader of the Council responsible. I tell you what, I did not see many letters coming from his colleague the Leader saying, “It is not him, it is me.” Did you see any letters clarifying it? This is what Les Carter says. Usually something is wrong, Andrew Carter, straightaway, letter in, “It is wrong, it is me, I am the Leader, not Les Carter.” Nothing said, Les. Have you had a clarification letter in? No.

Let me quote Les. Listen to Les. This is a great one. I think Les is the best vaudeville act we have got on big statements. During the June 2005 Council Meeting Les said this, “I will tell you this, the grass is going to be sorted out. I will tell you what. People will forget when it is back down to its proper level. It will be sorted and people will then say, yes, that administration got it right.” (*Laughter*)

Wonderful statements, plenty of, good old Les, you can always rely on him to sort it out, but, you know, there is a very serious part to this and that is because we try to take the environment very seriously, all of us, all parties try to persuade people to take the environment seriously and grass cutting is one of the ones I think you can start with.

In many communities – and I look at our villages – where you have got local people actually out every week, every month, trying to plant bulbs, trying to do something to improve their village or community and yet this time for the second year running their efforts have been undermined.

I think of those people – again, we have used this phrase a lot, closing the gap – that are trying to turn their lives around in a meaningful way, improve the homes, improve the community, improve whatever conditions they have had and every day they walk out like in the Ambertons and they see the grass has not been cut. What kind of statement is that to ordinary people trying to improve, that there is neglect and it is in the middle of the road. In the Ambertons, you can go for yourself and it is nearly five foot, six foot high. I think Roger, you have probably seen it as well. What kind of statement is the Council saying to those people? That we do not care, we neglect you and so on.

I will say this, for the old people – and I saw Councillor Murray in one and I am sure he is going to mention it as well – that for the second year running in places like Bramley, in places like the ones I know have been denied green space and gardens to share with their family their grandchildren and so on. The second year running when people have been denied an opportunity.

I have to quote the responses because Steve Smith – you talk about us and spin, listen to this from Steve Smith’s department. He says, “Our city wide grass cutting programme is on track and on schedule. While there is always room for improvement we are confident that most of last year’s problems have been tackled and resolved. We do not accept” – this is the bit that really gets you – “there is any general city-wide problems but there will inevitably be localised examples.”

Did you see the letter page the same day? We had letters from Drighlington, from Rodley, from Bramley, from Micklefield, from Rothwell and so on, all saying, what has happened yet again to this city. It has been a shambolic performance again from this administration.

It is not localised. It is actually quite general and there are not many parts of our city that have not had to actually face the lack of commitment and efficiency by this administration.

I think it is very basic, the service, delivering grass cutting. I do think it is time that we actually did something far more positive than that and that is why we accept Councillor Finnigan’s administration because I think he has got a point. His amendment, sorry! I got excited. I got excited by our new friendship. It will not last long. He got excited as well. His amendment is correct. Have any of us actually heard whether the operator, the contractor, Glendale, has been given any penalty points? Have they ever been fined? Has anything been done to actually try to improve their performance? The answer is, I do not think any of us have heard about whether there has been penalty bonuses on them at all.

I think it is very simple. You cannot talk about running a city if you cannot even keep the grass down. I think the people of Leeds deserve better, they deserve a better service, they deserve a better explanation and I think they deserve a better administration. I move, Lord Mayor, thank you.
(Applause)

COUNCILLOR LOWE: Between July and August 2005 the Scrutiny Board met to undertake an enquiry into the Street Screen Grounds Maintenance contract. It was referred to earlier by Barry and I think it was a really good piece of work. Throughout that exercise we made 21 recommendations and some of those recommendations actually applied to the future operation of the grounds maintenance contract. It is quite clear to me that those recommendations have not been listened to and have definitely not been acted upon.

Although the Chief Executive who attended the Scrutiny Board and the City Services Director acknowledged that a failure to deliver the grounds maintenance contract impacted significantly on both the Council and its citizens and that when the service goes wrong everybody notices, the situation in 2006 is as bad as the one in 2005.

Councillor Keith Wakefield has talked about some of the press but I have brought a few for us to reflect upon. We have got the sneering one from Scarborough, we have got a tall story of grass from Swillington where the residents are actually paying for their own grass cutting. In my own ward of Armley there is the Poplars, the Snowdens, St Bartholomew's Close, all writing to say why is the grass not being cut? We have got photographs from various places in my ward.

I thought it was really interesting just to read a little note from one of our constituents from St Bart's Close who said, "We had no problems when the Council was under the full control of Labour. Heaven help the country if the Liberal Democrats actually get voted into full Government at Westminster. If your efforts at a local level are anything to judge by, the country will grind to a halt." That is from Joy Chapman and it is a real person.

There were four recommendations that we made last year that I think applied to the future operation of the contract. Recommendation 9 said that where we have got a high risk and high profile contract, which everybody acknowledged this one is, there ought to be effective contingency planning in place.

If there is effective contingency planning in place, where is it, because there is no evidence, as far as I can see, that there is a contingency plan, otherwise the grass would have been cut using that method.

Recommendation 13, all data is to be updated so that the grass that should be cut will get cut and the grass that should not be cut does not get cut. I can tell you that in my own ward there are whole areas that have not been cut that should be cut, areas where elderly people live in sheltered accommodation. We have seen in the letters people saying that it has been months and months since they have had the grass cut. My mum and dad live in Seacroft and it is like living in the middle of the Selvas, so I know that there are whole areas of the city that have not been cut. That means the data is not properly updated and that was one of the very firm recommendations from the Scrutiny Board.

Recommendation 16 said that City Services was to closely monitor the performance of the contract. I have news for you. 'Closely monitor' is an active verb. It is not a passive one. That means you have to actually do something. You do not just follow them round looking at what they are doing and saying, "Oh, this is not a very good job, is it?" You then follow on

with action. We will be very happy to know what action is being taken as a consequence of this abysmal failure to follow up the contract as described in the contracts.

Recommendation 19 requires City Services to review the arrangements for weed control. This is obviously still not happening. I think there is a bit of a problem here. Glendale do not realise daffodils are not weeds. They are flowers. Dandelions are weeds. Outside my mum and dad's house there are lots and lots of dandelions. Call them what you like, they are there. They are in your garden, they are in my garden. I have not even got a garden, I have just got little tubs all full of dandelions so whatever they are, I would like them to be gone, please. They can only go if they get properly dealt with under the contract that has been developed with Glendales. I am sure that the people in Harewood who had all their daffodils cut down earlier this year would also reiterate that point.

So, in 2005 we could not agree whether it was City Services Management or Glendales that was incompetent. In 2006 we know that it is both. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Robert Finnigan to move an amendment.

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I am a little overcome at Keith's offer, if that is what it was, but I will try and move on with it anyway, not pretending in any way, shape or form to be Leader of the Council.

I have gone through 2002 summer, 2003 summer, 2004 summer, 2005 summer – we are now in 2006 summer. To be honest, the problems have remained fairly consistent. 2002, 2003, 2004 when it was in-house and we are still having the same problems and the same difficulties that I am having in 2005 and 2006. It was absolutely brilliant. I used to wander along, they were playing bowls along the roundabouts in Morley because it was so smooth and it was done so fabulously well in 2003, 2004.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: Do not demean the argument, my boy.

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: The fact of the matter is, if we are being straight and honest about it, it was not a whole lot better before than it was at this particular point. That is where I think we need to explore a little further about where we are going with this.

The Who played a concert earlier this week – last weekend if I remember rightly – and they have got a song called Don't Get Fooled Again. People will know it quite well. Within the song there is a lyric that talks about a parting on the left becomes a parting on the right. What Pete Townsend is getting at at that particular point is that the man in the street does not see any particular difference.

The residents in Morley are basically saying, "Look, we are not bothered whether it is in-house and we are not bothered whether it is privatised. Quite frankly, they are both as bad as each other."

Our role as being part and parcel of the opposition is to try and be constructive, to look at different ways of actually approaching this. Other Area Committee Chairmen have basically suggested that the way forward would be to delegate the grass cutting services down to area committee level,

down to a smaller and a more localised level. I think it is worth exploring why we might want to do that and what benefits we might actually gain, adopting a third way, a different approach.

I think if we did delegate it down to area level- and I know a lot of my colleagues who are Area Chairs also support this particular approach – we could see about breaking it down into more manageable chunks where local businesses might be interested and looking at actually providing the service. As it stands at this particular point, Leeds is far too big a Local Authority for any of the small and localised businesses to be able to bid for that particular contract. If it was delegated down to Area Committee level, there would be an opportunity then at that stage to see about what we are all talking about later on, about making sure that we have thriving communities that are sustainable, about making sure that we support those smaller businesses that might be able to compete if it is on a smaller basis.

We know in Morley that we have a local business that does lot of the work in terms of grass cutting for local schools, it has a very good reputation, is in a situation where people find them reliable and want to support those local businesses and indeed what has happened at that particular point is that schools have bought into that.

I would like to see if we can explore something similar at Area Committee level, because quite frankly I suspect that there are at least one and maybe two businesses in Morley, if it was a Morley-wide or a Morley-Rothwell-wide particular contract that they were bidding for, they may well be interested. You would at that particular point hit the reality of sustainable communities, supporting local businesses in a situation where you have got a localised approach that means that the people are cutting the grass, know the grass, know the area, live in the area, are more likely to be committed to that particular area.

As we are always and for ever constructive, we are suggesting that perhaps it is worth exploring at this particular stage a different approach that does not necessarily look at in-house - maybe in-house may be something that is suitable on an Area Committee level – or necessarily look at the private sector, but look at what works in different particular areas. One size does not fit all. Whether that is the Parks staff doing that or whether that is Glendales doing it, it does not fit all and having that localised approach seems to me is an idea worth perhaps exploring.

Clearly we will move this particular amendment. We do feel that those who have behaved badly ought to be punished in some way, shape or form but I think we need some newer and some deeper thinking and it is another plea for more delegation down to a local level and let local people get involved with not only commenting on those services but hopefully providing some of those services. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR ELLIOTT: Lord Mayor, I would like to second this proposal and reserve the right to speak.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Steve Smith to move a further amendment.

COUNCILLOR SMITH: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I have put this amendment down to put a proper perspective on the position with the delivery of the grass cutting contract this year.

Firstly, let us put some facts straight. The grass contract Councillor Wakefield refers to does not relate to all of the City Council's grassed areas. Secondly and generally the grass cutting on the ALMO and highways land is very much improved upon the position last year, bearing in mind that last year the contractor had only just completed the first cut of the grass. This is not the position this year where we are on the sixth cut.

Finally, there are some specific areas of land covered by this contract which have been allowed to grow for which the contractor must not be blamed, because they are specifically required not to cut these areas, and the areas I refer to are the land where communities have planted daffodils and highways rough cut grass which, according to the contract, is cut in July and September each year. However, there are questions that need to be answered so that the residents of Leeds can be made aware of the actions that this administration is taking to ensure that we deliver a sustainable solution to the contract arrangement it inherited from the former administration.

Are we as an administration happy that this contractor is delivering a satisfactory standard of grass cutting? No. We are not happy that the contractor is delivering a consistently high standard of grass cutting across the whole of the city, nor that their performance has met the specification requirements of the contract.

What are we doing about this? The contractor is being managed closely through the contract arrangements and is being held to account for missed areas and poor standards of cutting as soon as they are brought to the attention of the contract monitoring team. This includes deductions of payments and the serving of adverse performance reports.

Are we happy that the contractor is responding satisfactorily to the performance management arrangements? No. It is fair to say that the contractor has had some problems with the weather and equipment failure in May, but notwithstanding these problems, we are not satisfied that they have reacted in a satisfactory manner to the requirements placed upon them to improve their service in those areas where there are deficiencies.

The contractor has been unable to deliver a satisfactory standard of cut. The contractor has been unable to deal with many of the banks included in the contract because of the repetitive failure of specialist cutting machines.

Have we taken action to supplement the contract with other contracting resources? Yes. The administration has appointed another contractor who is now undertaking work which would otherwise have been done by the appointed contractor so as not to allow the grass to become a city-wide problem. In addition, the second contractor will be responsible for the delivery of the critical Britain in Bloom Communities grass cutting and is starting work on that this week.

I also have to ask another question. Are we happy that the monitoring teams are working as effectively as possible and the answer to that is no. Some of the ALMO monitoring arrangements for this contract leave a great deal to be required. The monitoring team and those performance managing this contract need to have regular feedback from every ALMO in the city. Such monitoring is the ALMO's responsibility, unless the ALMO teams are feeding back failures swiftly to the contractor, then missed areas will not be cut and, of course, tenants will be dissatisfied.

It is of interest to note that most of the sites where photos have been published are the very ALMO sites under the control of Councillor Wakefield's colleagues on the Labour benches.

Councillor Finnigan, as always constructive. However, we will not be supporting you on this occasion, but I hope that through the answers I have given it will give you some confidence that we are looking at all the issues associated with the contract.

So, there you have it. No, we are not satisfied that the contract is being delivered satisfactorily across the whole city, nor are we satisfied with the contractor's response to this administration's requirement to improve quickly and effectively, but we are proactively dealing with these issues properly and within the terms of the Council's contract with the contractor, which is the correct way to deal with such matters, and we have brought another contractor on stream to supplement the original contractor.

Finally, no, we are not satisfied that the ALMOs are doing their bit to ensure that missed areas are being reported back to the contractor for remedy so that their tenants are looked after properly in this matter.

Lord Mayor, I move the amendment. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: I second, Lord Mayor, and reserve the right to speak.

COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Lord Mayor, I think I have got a bit of advice for Councillor Smith. I think you need to get out more and certainly we would be more than happy to show you round our patches to give you a very clear picture of what has not been happening there over the last two years.

I have to say, what you were saying just now Steve, you did all but quote or misquote British Rail and talk about the wrong type of grass.

A couple of weeks ago our Middleton Ward members and myself went on a walkabout of one of our estates which we do regularly with officers, the police and residents, and I kid you not, one of the items on the agenda for the walkabout was tidy gardens. The whole event, of course, as you can imagine, was taken over discussing the failings of service delivery and particularly the failings on grass cutting in the area.

Lord Mayor, grass cutters had actually been out in the patch all through the day, according to residents, no doubt to try and make it look better before our visit, but I have to tell you, we found example after example of whole areas missed out, areas where one side of the street had been cut but the other side had been missed, and I kid you not, ask your officers to verify this, there was one area where they had actually almost turned it into a racetrack, where they had gone round the edge and cut it and left the whole bit in the middle. Do not try and tell me that it was because there were daffodils in the middle, because there was not a single daffodil in sight.

Some of the areas have not been cut at all since Glendales took over the contract, but some of the areas that have been left have become full of litter, bottles and in our patch needles, making former recreation and play areas hazardous for anyone, let alone for children who in the past have always used these areas to play out in.

Other factors. I understand that the requirement under the contract is that the contractor should go round and pick up litter before they cut the grass. Surprise, surprise, they have not been doing this, so you have one piece of litter, the grass cutter goes over it and suddenly you have a thousand pieces of litter scattering all over the area.

Machinery given out to the contractors is blamed. Sometimes it is too big, sometimes it is too small, sometimes it is too sharp and sometimes it is too blunt. The guys on the street trying to do this job are continually approached by residents who are in despair at the treatment they are being given.

Councillor Smith, the Leader of your group made it clear at a previous meeting of this Council that he does not see why people are so upset about having their bulbs devastated and their local environment ruined. Tell me this, please – how can we encourage residents to look after their own property and gardens when all around them is neglect and deteriorating services?

The grass cutting service in our communities since the contract was let remains a disgrace. We demand to know when it will be put right and when it will be dealt with properly. The situation is urgent, Councillor Smith. Your amendment is so weak I cannot believe it. People in this city deserve better. Thank you, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR MURRAY: Lord Mayor, in the election, the last election, the Tories in my ward in their election literature put out the fact that they were promising a better service and extra grass cuts and it did sound promising and it looked like good news. It did not do them any good. No good at all - partly because the people in Garforth know that the service that they had last year was poor. Not just that Steve, they could see things were getting worse, really worse. In fact as far as we could tell the only thing that we were getting from the Tory administration was green grass and lots of it. That is what you were delivering.

Keith mentioned earlier about tenants not being able to enjoy the summer, not being able to get out into their gardens and enjoy the sun. They cannot even get out into the gardens to put out their washing. The grass in some of these places is not *this* high, it is not *that* high, it is – Bernard, can you just stand up please? Bernard, if you lived in one of our properties out there, the grass would be taller than you and you would not be able to get out.

When the service was made aware of this problem and were obviously going to do something about it – what they were doing to do about it I do not know, I do not know how you cut grass *this* high in a way. I do not know how you get round to do it. Is it a scythe, sickle, whatever? It is clearly a challenge. They rang me up to find out where the street was in Great Preston that they had to go to be able to cut the grass, which I found even more deeply worrying.

Just listening to ordinary residents – and I am sure a few of us have had lots of letters from people – this is a five page letter with a petition at the end of it but it does describe what is happening in ordinary terms:

“The whole area, once so pretty and presentable, is now in total disarray. Hedgerows overgrown,

hedgerows in the ginnels meeting. In some places it is a foot high, dandelions and daisies in abundance. Patios with weeds growing very high amongst the cracks, and I could go on and on. All the residents are distressed by this state of affairs, especially the older residents, many not able to cope with the untidiness and have to ask relatives or other neighbours to help.”

They are loath to do that but that is what they are doing and in some parts of the ward, they are paying for it – an extra little tax, if you like, paying to be able to get your grass cut, £20 a month – a lot of money for people who do not have a lot.

The final point I would like to say to you, Steve, is this. When you look in the short term to be able to get something done, can we take stuff away from maybe the work you might be doing on the roundabouts, work you might be doing on the hedgerows, on the highways and the byways - prioritise and get work done for the elderly, get the jobs done there, tidied up, take away this distress and make sure that the rest of the summer they can have some time to enjoy it. Thanks, Lord Mayor. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR MULHERIN: Lord Mayor, I could talk about the grass verges and the green spaces in East Ardsley, Lofthouse, Robin Hood and Heritage Village, which has been either uncut or badly cut under this contract, where litter has been shredded and scattered all over the place and areas where grass verges have been left with a Mohican up the middle because the equipment has been broken.

Beyond all this, though, I have concerns about the failure to cut the grass and hedges in our sheltered housing complexes. This is the same issue that I raised a year ago in the debate that we had then, but again in 2006 old and vulnerable tenants are being left with hedges growing wild and attempting to either cut them themselves or paying private gardeners to come in and do the job for them when they are already paying to have the service provided by the Council.

We have got photographs of tenants in the Morley Observer who have been out with scissors trying to cut their own hedges. Leaving elderly and vulnerable tenants with wildly overgrown gardens makes them not only anxious about the state of their own local environment but also potential victims for targets of distraction burglary. This is a very serious issue which needs to be addressed. We have tried as local Councillors to resolve them with meetings with Leeds South Homes, officers and we have also tried to get meetings with relevant officers from City Services. Up until I spoke to Steve Smith on Monday I was not getting very far with having a meeting with City Services officers but they have now agreed to meet with me later this week.

Last year we reluctantly accepted that there had been teething problems with the contract. One year later we have to raise these same issues yet again in this Chamber and it is simply not acceptable. People deserve better. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR SELBY: Lord Mayor, here we are again, same problems, same mess, same shambles and if you accept what Councillor

Steve Smith tells us, in our borough the person who is at fault is Barry Anderson because he is Chair of the North West ALMO.

COUNCILLOR ANDERSON: I get the blame for everything.

COUNCILLOR SELBY: And quite rightly so Barry. You deserve it. Our Council tax payers are entitled to have an explanation as to why we have to debate this issue again because of the shambles that has occurred. We listened earlier on to what Councillor Smith had to tell us, or rather the briefing note he read to us.

I would like to know a little bit more about what he has actually done to avoid the repetition. Did he call any meetings from officers of City Services, Parks and Countryside, ALMOs and Glendale to identify those areas where problems occurred last year? Is he sure that Glendale were given all the information they needed in order to fulfil the contract? What enquiries did he make to see that Parks and Countryside have provided all the information regarding areas needed to be in the contract? Did he check with Glendales – ask to see what checks had been made with Glendales to see if the mapping system coincided and if he did not, why not? So far as this year is concerned has any additional staff been recruited by City Services to check which areas should have been included in the contract?

If additional staff have been employed, how many? What are their duties? What is the likely cost of additional staff? What work have they identified to be done? Who is going to do it and, again, at what cost?

If there are additional costs, what is going to be the effect of those additional costs on City Services' budget? Are we going to see later on in the year a reduction in services in other parts of the department to cover this extra expense?

So far as complaints to City Services are concerned, have they all been passed on to Glendale, because my understanding is that they have not? In some areas, ALMO caretaking teams have had to carry out grass cutting work. What proposals does Councillor Smith have to see to it that the ALMOs are compensated for the extra cost? Has he discussed this with Les Carter to see if any additional management fee will be paid to the ALMOs for the work that they have had to do because of his incompetence? If he has not discussed this with Les Carter, can I suggest that he does so as a matter of urgency?

Can I ask Les what proposals he has to compensate leaseholders who, as part of their annual fee, pay for grass cutting? Can we have an assurance from him that he will consider that sympathetically and by the time of the next Council meeting tell us what his proposals are to refund leaseholders?

COUNCILLOR J L CARTER: You are always after money.

COUNCILLOR SELBY: We are entitled to ask for detailed answers to these questions, important questions raised by our constituents, and if we do not get satisfactory answers, we are entitled to ask why are we paying Councillor Smith a responsibility allowance, just as we ask of Councillor Jennings? Why is it, Lord Mayor, that when we have Liberal Democratic Executive Members they always seem to make a mess of things?

This contract is for three years. What realistic assurance can we have that the problems that we talked about last year, the sort of problems we are

talking about now are going to be resolved in the next year? Will they be any better? Thank you. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR PRYKE: Lord Mayor, I am glad Councillor Selby has asked that the Council tax payers should get an explanation. I can provide some explanation as to what is going on from my own experience and from what I have observed elsewhere in the Council. I hope it will enlighten you.

In his own ALMO area – and you are a Board Member, are you not, Brian – we know from our ward that your ALMO has not informed Glendale of all the land that it has that is supposed to be cut.

In Councillor Gruen's ALMO, South- East Leeds Homes, we know that they also have not told Glendale about all the land that they are supposed to be cutting for them and we are told by the ALMO that the estate caretaking team is supposed to deal with some of the hedges and the overgrown rose bushes and so on. The officer has told us that as the estate caretaking team consists of only one person, it will take quite a long while to getting round to doing it.

Now, when I first got elected as Scrutiny Chair and I met with the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing, I expressed a hope that perhaps in future the Council would not be employing quite so many consultants to do what I thought was the Council's job for it, because I had regarded the previous Labour administration as outsourcing an awful lot of its own responsibilities.

I was told by several different people around the Council that we did not have the expertise in Leeds City Council to do a lot of this work because it was so expert, when our people got trained up for it, they left for much better paid jobs elsewhere and rather than waiting for our people to be trained in it, it was cheaper for us to employ consultants to do that.

Of course, we have done it very recently with the Price Waterhouse Cooper's examination of our ALMOs in the examination as to how we restructure the ALMOs to get better value for money. Thank you, Neighbours and Housing.

One of the findings in the Price Waterhouse Cooper summary is about estate or grounds maintenance payments by the ALMOs. The average cost per property for Leeds ALMOs for estate grounds maintenance is £5 per property. The average cost per property for all the other ALMOs in the country is £36. A factor of 7 in that. You get what you pay for. If you are paying only £5, you are not going to get as good a service as if you paid £36, so the ALMOs are not paying the average rate for the country, the going rate for grounds maintenance and the ALMO boards should take responsibility for that.

Most of the complaints that I have had in my ward about grass cutting this year have concerned ALMO land, not highways land. I think my colleagues share the same thing. The ALMOs definitely bear some responsibility for this and they are not seemingly taking it on at the moment.

So, when Councillor Murray bemoans his people with five foot high grass or whatever and other people worry about their sheltered housing residents being imprisoned in the grass, they should be looking to their own

ALMO boards for that, especially as we heard in the Scrutiny enquiry last year on which I sat as well that the ALMOs had wanted Glendale at first to collect up all the cut grass after they had cut it. Glendale tendered for that and the ALMOs said, “We cannot afford it, go back and give us another tender”, which they then did. You get what you pay for. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Lord Mayor, before I sack Steve Smith, call back David Moortown and Brian Jennings to come on to the front bench and before I myself resign, first reappoint Councillor Christine Brett to take over my position in Moortown, perhaps I can make a few comments.

We have heard this afternoon the way in which things are insidiously slipped into the discussion. We have heard from two Labour members this afternoon about hedge cutting. What has hedge cutting got to do with the contract with Glendale? It has got nothing whatsoever to do with that. Insidiously this has been slipped into the discussion, the same way in which there is the suggestion that every single bulb in this city was mowed down in spring and there were no daffodils, no crocii, no snowdrops anywhere in the city. Another insidious, ridiculous over-exaggeration.

If you want to know where that comes from, one ought to look at former Councillor Bruce’s blogsite and then you will see the advice that he gives to his fellow Labour members which is pick the issue, exaggerate it to the point of fantasy, repeat it often enough and then eventually everybody starts to believe it. Really that is what is going on here and it detracts from what is a serious discussion.

You have heard from Steve Smith. He has said on several issues that we are not satisfied, we are not pretending that everything is acceptable. On the question of penalty you have heard that penalties are being exacted on the contractor. On the question of contingency you have heard that there is an alternative contractor now in place doing part of the work. On the issue of monitoring you asked the question whether the contractor is brought in for meetings. My God, they have been living here, quite honestly, they are in here so often to be questioned and pushed about what is going on. You have heard from us that whilst things are not the way you are describing them as bad as they were last year, we are not satisfied. What is so breathtaking – and this is part of this former Councillor Bruce approach – only two years out of administration there are so many of you that were in senior positions that know full well that you cannot just cut a contract dead, which is what you are pressing for. Were we to attempt that, the legal consequences would be dire. You know from when you were in control that there are processes which we must go through to enforce a contract.

You have had ample explanation of what those processes are but I take the point that we need to get this right. I take it absolutely but the point is, you are ignoring the point, you cannot just take the contractor out and then click your fingers and make it be the way you want it to be.

The situation is infinitely better than it was last year but repeat again, you are asking about penalties – penalties are being exacted. You have asked about monitoring - monitoring is going on in depth. The matter is being brought under control. There are many, many lessons that we are learning from this and when it comes to contract renewal, we will not forget those lessons. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Lord Mayor, let us get some things straight, shall we? Who decided that this was a wonderful Utopian idea to

tender out the grass cutting contact? They did. No-one over here suddenly thought one day, "I know, let's go and tender out the grass cutting contact." Far from it. You know full well, or the members of your Cabinet know full well, that the decision had already been taken to go out to tender long before this administration came on the scene. You decided (*interruption*) – Lord Mayor, perhaps if they piped down, some of the newer members, they might learn something here. Clearly they were kept in the dark for years about what was going on in the Cabinet arrangements within Labour because these are the facts. If they want them, they are happy to see the files. Remember, we have got the files. Councillor Illingworth seeks to get some of the files but we have got the files.

Lord Mayor, the fact is, as some well know, the decision had already been taken to tender out grass cutting. Why had that decision been taken? Why did the then Cabinet think it was a good idea to go out to tender?

The fact of the matter is that grass cutting in this city has been under funded for the best part of 30-odd years. That is the fact of it. That is the truth of it and that was proven, actually, when the tender was put out, because if you evaluate the price that Parks and Countryside was charging the city compared to what the tenders came in at, there was a vast, a huge difference. So, effectively for years, the best part of 30 years, the then administration was starving a department of being able to cut the grass efficiently.

Nevertheless, that decision was taken and yes, we can be accused of not running that contract. The fact is, though, that anybody who knows anything about contract knows that when you have awarded a contract it is awarded, you have got to hold that contractor to certain strict targets.

Again, if the members opposite who are chattering just stop a minute – one minute, please, Keith, and if people just listen they might just learn some facts, because that is the problem, Lord Mayor, they do not listen and then they just go on and repeat the same thing over and over again. The fact of the matter is that out of five cuts the contractor has received two adverse reports and three adverse letters. That means 100% of the time that the grass cuts that have taken place, the Executive Member and the department have let the contractor know that we as an authority are not happy with their performance. Got that? So we are not happy with their performance and we want them to do better.

If anybody wants to see this contract, by the way, to figure out what our mechanisms are of enforcing it, they are welcome to see it but the fact of the matter is that we have to go through a procedure.

I hear some of the members, Councillor Driver, "No, no, no." The fact is, Councillor Driver knows this much about the law. Not a thing. Legal agreements – what are they? Forget them. Let us rip them all up. Let us start all over again. That is his attitude. Let us land the Council with a bill for millions of pounds because of its irresponsible actions. (*Interruption*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Order.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: I think you are being told by the Lord Mayor to be quiet. The fact of the matter is, Lord Mayor, this is the only option that is open to us in terms of pursuing this contractor and that is precisely what we are doing.

Let us move on to the ALMOs, Lord Mayor. Who has got £10m of balances, I am reliably informed? Who is it? Members in ALMOs. You ALMO directors, your officers are responsible for monitoring the contracts 100% within your ALMO areas. You are not doing it. You failed in that regard.

Lord Mayor, let us just pick up Councillor Blake's point which I have to say is absolute total and utter something-ollocks. She talks about the recreation and play areas in our city not being able to be used. That is rubbish. Glendale do not cut them. We cut those areas in-house. You said they were riddled with needles. Where has all that come from? It goes back to what Councillor Harris was saying. It is the introduction of many issues to try and discredit the administration. It is not going to work, Lord Mayor.
(*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you, Councillor Proctor.

COUNCILLOR AKHTAR: A couple of points which were raised and I feel I have got to raise this in public. One was to do with Councillor Blake when she said that Councillor Smith needs to come out and walk about in the city. Let me tell you, members of the Council it was only a couple of weeks ago when Councillor Smith spent half a day not only walking around with myself and Councillor Taylor but with the local residents. Let us get this right.

Clearly that is the commitment from the Exec Members of this administration. It is not only Councillor Smith but from the Leader's office to the Deputy Leader, they all come out and they do talk to the residents.

One thing I do not like and I have never done this, using the vulnerable people for a political reasons. All day long – and I do sympathise with the Lord Mayor as well, it is his first meeting and I think he should quieten down the opposition for a time being. I am sure my Lord Mayor...

THE LORD MAYOR: You may proceed, Councillor Akhtar.

COUNCILLOR AKHTAR: I am sure your chairmanship needs to tell the opposition it is a time to listen. It is a time to listen to the ruling.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Akhtar, I can do that. Carry on, please.

COUNCILLOR AKHTAR: We were talking about the ALMOs. I had elderly members of the community from Gipton call me a couple of weeks ago with regard to the grass cuts and this was after the grass cut ALMO is done. Can I take this opportunity publicly on behalf of the people of East Leeds to thank Councillor Smith for coming out two weeks ago and spending half a day with the people of Gipton and Harehills. Thank you.

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: You do not represent the people of East Leeds, so do not quote the people of East Leeds. Secondly, the number of own goals you scored on this resolution is absolutely amazing. You get Councillor Harris standing up and saying of course we accept things are not perfect, things could be better. Then Councillor Pryke gets up and denies anything is wrong in the camp and it is all the ALMOs fault. Then Councillor Smith stands up and says, basically, yes, not everything is right

but give us more time and it will be OK. Then we have a rant and a rave from Councillor Proctor. We obviously know you are in dead trouble.

The fact of the matter is this. At the last election, you lot were (*inaudible*) and we got some new members and you ain't. You have not got any new members anywhere. You did not win any of the seats you were going to win. You were going to win six seats and you were going to win six seats and what have you won? Not a dicky bird – not a dicky bird have you won. The fact of the matter is, the time is ticking for you. The bell is tolling. (*Interruption*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Order.

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: You have eleven months left because the people are judging you. It does not matter who let the contract or did not let the contract. It does not matter who specified it. What matters is, you have been in control for two years and you have cocked it up. Week after week, month after month, year after year.

You talk about the ALMOs. Leslie Carter and his other colleagues come down and they do a quarterly visit to all the ALMOs. Now, Les listen to me. On how many occasions, when you have gone round the ALMOs, have you raised grass cutting? Not once. Not once. It has not been important to you. You have raised performance issues and not grass cutting, so do not come and blame us about grass cutting. (*Interruption*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Order.

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: (*Mobile phone rings*) £5, I know Lord Mayor. The fact of the matter, Lord Mayor, is, of course, this.

COUNCILLOR: It was his pacemaker! (*Laughter*)

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: The grass is not being cut. You have heard Councillor Wakefield say that we would accept the resolution. (*Mobile phone rings*) £10, Lord Mayor. We will accept the resolution from the Morley Borough Independents. If you look at that amendment from the Morley Borough Independents and ours, you should be accepting that. If you were a responsible administration you would accept that amendment and you would accept the White Paper. Instead you are trying to hide behind what is a facile amendment which says, actually, nothing to do with us, we cannot be blamed, we are going to carry on the way we are.

I hope you carry on the way you are because next year you will lose even more votes. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Cleasby, is there a point of order?

COUNCILLOR CLEASBY: I am being serious. I do believe it is important, if you will allow me to explain.

THE LORD MAYOR: Point of order, is it.

COUNCILLOR CLEASBY: A point of order, Lord Mayor. The ALMOs have been referred to several times. On the list as published members who I know who are members of ALMOs have not declared that.

What I am asking, Lord Mayor before we get any deeper into any mess, the proper declarations are made so therefore I would not be confused.

THE LORD MAYOR: OK. Councillor Cleasby, it is a matter for members to declare their interest if they are members of ALMO and they should declare interest.

COUNCILLOR ANDERSON: Is it a personal interest? I am asking for legal advice here. It is not prejudicial, surely.

THE CHIEF LEGAL SERVICES OFFICER: In the way that the debate is going, I would suggest that if members wish to declare an interest they could declare a personal interest because you have been appointed by the Authority to the ALMO boards. I do not think the way the debate is going that you have to declare a prejudicial interest and, even if you did have to declare a prejudicial interest, you could use the exemption of the fact that you have been appointed by the Authority to the ALMO board.

COUNCILLOR ANDERSON: In that case I will declare a personal interest as being a member of the Leeds North West Homes.

THE LORD MAYOR: Hands up all who want to declare? Is there any ALMO Director who does not wish to declare an interest?

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I think we ought to proceed with the debate and if members wish to declare an interest they may do so. There is no obligation for you to tell them to do so. It is quite clearly a diversionary tactic. Please sit down when I am on my feet unless you give way. Councillor Cleasby has done that as a diversion, my Lord Mayor, and there is no such thing and it is an abuse of process.

THE LORD MAYOR: Members of Council, please. I have spoken to the Chief Legal Officer and I think we need to proceed with the Council business and we will carry on with the comments as we should do. We have had a slight break and a bit of excitement and now I will call on the next speaker.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: If members wish to declare an interest they have to do so.

THE LORD MAYOR: They have done.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Lord Mayor, the Legal Officer will confirm that members have to declare an interest in.

THE CHIEF LEGAL SERVICES OFFICER: The ALMO directors put their hands up to declare that they have a personal interest. I also then asked, just to make sure, if there was any ALMO director who did not wish to declare an interest in order that we can make sure.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: Is it not the case that the Lord Mayor's ruling is final on this?

THE CHIEF LEGAL SERVICES OFFICER: Yes that is correct, Councillor Atha.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: The purpose of declaring interest is all the Council is aware and the whole of Council is not aware of every member's interest in the matter. That is what Councillor Cleasby meant.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I shall report you to Standards in that case.

COUNCILLOR CLEASBY: What a brilliant idea, Councillor Atha, just for a change you have done something right. *(Laughter)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Can we move on now because we did ask if members did not want to declare – is there any member who has not declared interest? There is not any. We have seen your hand, Councillor Akhtar. We have seen your prominent position. If there is any member who has not declared an interest.

THE CHIEF LEGAL SERVICES OFFICER: There has been a request for clarification of the names of the ALMO directors and perhaps an easy way to do it is if those ALMO directors who are wishing to declare a personal interest do it by the recorded vote system and then we actually have a list of them all. Can those ALMO directors and only ALMO directors who wish to declare a personal interest please press their P button and if you are wishing to declare a personal interest press the plus button. The Chief Executive will now just read through that list for confirmation.

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Members who have declared personal interest in the matter are Councillor R Brett; Councillor B Lancaster; Councillor B Anderson, Councillor R Feldman; Councillor A Lowe; Councillor B Green; Councillor T Hanley; Councillor R Lewis; Councillor J Kantar; Councillor P Ewes; Councillor A Taylor; Councillor A Blackburn; Councillor G Laity; Councillor D Schofield; Councillor G Wilkinson; Councillor J Elliott; Councillor T Murray; Councillor J Dowson; Councillor A Ogilvy; Councillor B Selby; Councillor K Parker; Councillor B Hollingsworth; Councillor Robinson; Councillor Wadsworth; Councillor Illingworth.

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you, Members of Council.

COUNCILLOR FELDMAN: Is there anyone left?

COUNCILLOR ATHA: To pursue this enquiry, if this is a personal interest why is it not prejudicial too because clearly There is money involved and I would think that if in fact members of the ALMO know that this could affect their finances and so on.

THE CHIEF LEGAL SERVICES OFFICER: Whether members wish to declare a prejudicial interest or not is entirely a matter for the members themselves. However, members could take advantage of the exemption if they do think it is a prejudicial interest because they have been appointed to those ALMO boards by the Authority.

THE LORD MAYOR: The next speaker contribution from Councillor Karen Renshaw, please.

COUNCILLOR RENSHAW: Thank you, Lord Mayor, at last. It is like waiting to have my grass cut! *(Laughter)* I would just like to say a few words on that note and I would like to read out a small piece of correspondence received while requesting grass cutting in my area.

“I have checked our records and it appears that this section of grass has not been included in the new contract.”

Which new contract? Which year? When? The new one two years ago or the new one this year?

“We will begin procedures to try and get it on to the grass cutting schedule as soon as possible. This does, however, include awaiting approval from a budget holder as well as visiting site and measuring the grass and obtaining a quotation for the service from the contractors and we will advise an estimated four to six weeks for this to be quoted.”

I would like the administration to explain why it takes four to six weeks, in which time the grass should have been cut anyway, and what is the problem with the budgets that they are having?

COUNCILLOR WAKEFIELD: I have to smile at Councillor Proctor because you know when they are deep in trouble. His arms start waving more and he gets more – I thought he was a mellow, calm person after he became married with a family. You saw the trouble he was in today. He did everything to put a smokescreen up. Indeed, I will go through the history of the contract.

There is one thing John has not told you. The reason why he smiles now is he was only too glad to get rid of the grass cutting department over to Steve. There is no doubt about that, never mind the history of it. He helped to transfer it over.

It is a bit like the Ralph Pryke contribution as well. They have done everything, everything they possibly can – filibustered this debate, disturbed this debate, because deep down they do not want to take responsibility for it. Ralph Pryke wandered all round the ALMOs. Not once did he talk about his own responsibility, about the administration’s responsibility to cut grass. I have to say it did not work, it does not work and it is not acceptable.

Let us go to Steve Smith, because his contribution, I have to say, was not good enough. If ever we had heard almost an apologist for the terrible service we have had written by a well-known author, which is not Steve Smith, this is today. I have to say, that was not good enough. It was very simple. All you had to do is accept responsibility, say you got it wrong like some of you did and say you are going to improve it, but instead we heard the same excuses we heard last year.

What did we hear? The weather this year. We have got the weather to blame. What was it – not too long ago he used the same thing as his officer used. He blamed the daffodils. Have we only just had daffodils in the last two years? I can recall daffodils being here a long time ago and somehow managing to cut round them and keep them year on year. I am sorry, Steve, it was extremely disappointing. You save your sermon for Sunday and I will come to your church and I will listen to you. I will come to your church on Sunday and get your line, because what I am trying to do is trying to get down to the nuts and bolts of this issue.

Actually, I think, Robert, you are wrong in one sense. The service under the Local Authority was not brilliant. We know that. No-one is pretending that it was perfect, but the one thing you could do when it was run by a Local Authority is, you could say, “I am sorry, you have missed that, can you go out and do it?” and by and large they would respond to do it. That is the difference. Instead, what we have got is it has not been put in the contract, we did not know it. In fact there was one example I think Councillor Parker told me, was it somewhere where they were in Sherburn in Elmet – South Milford. Because it said in the Elmet constituency they went off to cut in South Milford, so that is the kind of problem you get when you introduce this contract culture.

What I will agree with you, Robert, is that I do think you have merit about local administration. I think there is something in the argument that says local Councillors who know their patch better, who understand all the issues, who get lobbied by local people, could help enormously at a local committee level to get this service right. I do think there is something in the argument.

Let us not escape. This is really a vote of censure today and I expected a lot more from the administration, from the Executive Board member today, two members who have to face their communities over the next few weeks and try to explain and try to get an improved service. Frankly, it has not been acceptable. Les, you can come out with your statement very soon about it all improving, like we heard last year. It has not been good enough. We have heard every excuse today, we have had all the diversion tactics, we have had people standing jumping up and down and all we want, as somebody said, is not the contract cut but the grass cut in this city and it is time that we had a public service that means a lot to local people delivered efficiently and properly for the people, the taxpayers of this city who expect a lot better from this Council. Thank you, Lord Mayor.
(Applause)

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Lord Mayor, it is that moment in the evening where we have two choices. In any event it is up to the members whether they wish to vote or not. Under Council Procedure Rule 22.1 I move that procedure rule 3.2 be suspended to allow all White Paper Motions to be debated.

COUNCILLOR HAMILTON: I second that.

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I all upon the vote of suspension of Council Procedure Rules to allow all the business to be discussed and debated? (A vote was taken)

(The motion was carried)

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: What is being sought under the Council Procedure Rules are recorded votes on, if necessary all three but all of the complex of amendments and substantive resolutions. If we can take them in turn, please.

The first vote is on the amendment in the name of Councillor Finnigan. *(A recorded vote was taken)* Only a member who has declared a prejudicial interest – and to my recollection none did – would be precluded from voting in this matter.

THE LORD MAYOR: 92 present, 40 in favour, zero abstentions, 51 against.

(The amendment was lost)

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: The second vote is on the further amendment in the name of Councillor Smith. *(A recorded vote was taken)*

THE LORD MAYOR: 93 present, 52 in favour, zero abstentions and 41 against.

(The amendment was carried)

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: That further amendment now becomes the substantive motion, so a third vote is required on that substantive motion, which was the further amendment in the name of Councillor Smith. *(A recorded vote was taken)*

THE LORD MAYOR: 93 members present, 52 in favour, zero abstentions and 41 against.

(The motion was carried)

ITEM 12 – WHITE PAPER MOTION – WOODHOUSE MOOR

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I think it would be possible now for me to move the vote, possibly have a quick majority but the others would come streaming back in. Quite frankly, what we are seeing today – and Councillor Proctor, you are as much to blame as the person standing up behind you – is making a mockery of the Council and the way it behaves. I do not mind about the rudeness. I do not mind about people leaving because someone is getting up to speak, because quite frankly we have all done it at one time or another, but if we reduce this Council to the mockery it is today at every Council meeting, it is a wonder that anyone will vote for us if they come to a Council meeting.

It is time we looked seriously at the behaviour. It is time we looked seriously at you, to a lesser extent, but the two Carters, who one majors in bluffery and noise and the other in verbal abuse, and really we are getting to the point now where we are no longer conducting effectively Council debates. Whether we are or not, I am going to say what I was going to say and hopefully it may have some effect. If it does not, so what? At least I shall behave in the manner I think appropriate and the majority of those who remain here think appropriate.

That is the resolution which is at Item 12 – This Council congratulates the residents of Woodhouse and Hyde Park and their supporters in preserving Woodhouse Moor from the planner parking scheme. It deplores the Lib Dems who failed to listen to the words and views of the residents and it calls upon the Council to put the money it was going to put into the car park into the moor itself.

I have a document here dated 9 January presented to Mr Gay asking for the release of £170, 341 for building a car park on Woodhouse Moor. The document stated, “Partners in the project include the local ward Councillors and community and friends’ groups.” The document goes on to say that not only local consultations have been completed, but that local groups are actual partners in the project. This is a straightforward lie.

Sue Buckle of South Headingley Community Association said, "This is blatantly untrue. The first we knew of it was when we read about it in the Evening Post." She goes on to say that by the time the community associations learned of the proposal planning permissions had been submitted and the Council had drawn up a timetable to seek tenders for the work by April 6th, accepted tender by May 6th and start on site on August 6th to complete the programme by December 6th.

So the plans were all there. It was going ahead. This misrepresentation of community support so enraged the community that they asked me to refer the matter to the Ombudsman, which I have done. Why did they ask me? They asked me because their own Councillors would not do it. Why? Because they had espoused this particular plan and clearly they could not refer themselves to Ombudsman.

These Lib Dem Councillors were part and parcel of the subterfuge of this particular plot. Their support for the car park was ultimately quite public but initially for six months it was kept a secret. The community groups opposing the scheme are all those surrounding Woodhouse Moor, each one. The ruling coalition hoped to slip this through because the car park would have been a great revenue earner and who cares amongst them if a most deprived area of Leeds loses part of the one amenity it really enjoys?

This kind of concept, this kind of philosophy goes along with the closing of a place like Miles Hill, like Beckett's Park, like closing the South Leeds Sports Centre on the pretext of it going to be refurbished but never reopening again. It is totally unfair and unjust to tackle the most hard up people in Leeds with this kind of project.

Compare this scheme, for instance, with the one at Pudsey where they are going to spend £450,000 on embellishing the park; £185,000 alone on a children's playground. Compare with what they are going to do with Woodhouse Moor – spend £170,000 on putting a car park on it. What a contrast.

I referred to a subterfuge because an original document I have in my possession and have here was shown to the Lib Dem Chair of the Leeds North West Inner Area Committee in June 2005. He did not tell the rest of the committee publicly – he may have told his own colleagues – but that is the wickedness of the present system, the secrecy amongst small groups of people. He has declined to tell me, though I have asked him by e-mail, just when he heard of the question. He has replied that it is no longer relevant as the matter is now settled and over, but you will not be able to say that to the Ombudsman when the Ombudsman comes asking questions and you will not be able to say, "My memory is not up to it", because we can ask the officers, who informed you of this at that time.

Do not think that this project is over either. Councillor Carter said to the Executive Board that the moor is an asset and will be looked at in terms of further investment. That is a bit frightening for the people in the area. The planning application had not been withdrawn at that time but last Friday the planners told us – only last Friday – that they were waiting for this planning permission, for five copies of the cross-section plans, five copies of the highway statement, five copies of the detailed use, security, staffing and so on. That was last Friday. Planning committee there and waiting this information. Guess what happened on Monday? The planning permission

was withdrawn. Why? Because it heard of the enquiry we were making about it and they are trying to exonerate themselves or remove themselves from the position. That is the reason and no other reason.

If the coalition was sincere it would have withdrawn this application at the time they decided to drop the scheme. Councillor Hussain was publicly supporting the proposal in the YEP in April which led to Freda Matthews of the Woodhouse Community Association pointing out to him that consultation does not amount so simply making objections to planning permissions and applications.

Of course, he changed his tune later, after the election result which nearly cost the Lib Dems the seat. What did he say? As local Councillors we see one of our key roles as being to find out local people's views on issues such as this and not pay mere lip service to them. That is hypocrisy of an enormous kind. It is the kind of hypocrisy that Libby was talking about when he said that Scylla had dipped his nose in the trough of the deepest hypocrisy and that is in fact what this was – hypocrisy.

It takes tremendous nerve to publicly go out and say, “We believe in this” and then later on say, “No, we have listened to you and we do not believe in it.” Either they were lying initially or they were lying subsequently – one or the other – and it will not do.

They have let the people down whom they represent. Their party shares the same responsibility as these three local members. Why? Because the Lib Dems do not have the guts to stand up to the steamroller that Councillor Andrew Carter is.

I have been a person who has watched Andrew over many years. He was Leader of an opposition without any hope of ever getting into power. He has got a great deal of skill, a great deal of force and as an individual he is a steamroller and guess what? All the Lib Dems and the others the Greens – the Greens! – are like poodles on a leash or like he is the puppet master and he pulls the strings and they obey and it just is not good enough in this kind of society.

The shock election result led Councillor Carter in a panic to drop the scheme but to say in a moment of pique that the original sum would be spent on other parks in the city if it was worthy money and investment in the parks of Woodhouse, why spend it in other areas? Maybe in Pudsey or somewhere like that.

A word about the amendment. This amendment is quite dishonest and again I pay tribute to Councillor Carter. He is not moving this because he knows how damn stupid it is. He has left it to someone else who is not bright enough to see just how stupid it is. It is quite dishonest. (*Interruption*) Just do not get excited because I will be kind to you in a minute.

It is quite dishonest. No-one believes in its sincerity. If you look at it, it is blatantly insincere. It is so obviously a sham it is embarrassing. It compliments the local Councillors on listening to the concern for the local residents. You cannot believe that seriously, that anyone would believe that in the ward, when the Councillors were saying just the very opposite until after the election when you thought they had lost the seat.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Is it a lie then?

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I will tell you it is a lie when I get to it, but I do it in my own time. It refers, this amendment, to the proposal to invest in Woodhouse Moor through a lottery bid. This again is a complete fiction. It is totally misleading. There is no plan. Have you seen a plan, Councillor Proctor? Answer the question? Councillor Proctor, are you there? Coming in, coming in.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Carry on.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: Have you seen a plan? Have you anything in writing? I will tell you why I am asking directly, because I have already put an application in under the Freedom of Information Act asking to see the plan that the amendment refers to. I have also got the benefit and comfort of an e-mail from the Director of Leisure Services that said, "There is a plan to have a plan. It is embryonic. There are no timetables, there are no details. We have got to consult first." In other words, there is no plan but this refers to it as a plan.

Now, tell me, Councillor Proctor, is that the truth or a lie? No answer. Of course, embarrassment. This is why, Councillor Carter, you did not move it, because you are too sharp. You really are too sharp.

So, as I come to the end, all I would say is, the truth of the matter is this resolution calls for three things. One, condemnation of the Lib Dem Councillors for not listening. The red light may mean one thing to some and one thing to them. To me it means sit down. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR OGILVIE: Second and reserve the right to speak.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I have to say – and I address these remarks primarily to the newer members of the Labour Group – you really must wonder sometimes what on earth you have come to, must you not, and some of the newer Members of Council, when you see people who are of considerable age in this Chamber pontificating in such a ridiculous pompous way as to think that no-one else in the entire Chamber is good enough to do anything better than I.

Perhaps that is why Councillor Atha finds it so difficult to relinquish the levers of power of any of the many organisations that he still has his sticky mitts on all across this city.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: Most of which are semi-bankrupt.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: I think, Lord Mayor that precise matter is something that we will return to later in this Council.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: If that is an allegation that an organisation of which I have been charged are semi bankrupt, I hope the person making the note will in fact record that because that, if I may say, is defamatory of those organisations and they include some of the major organisations in Leeds.

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: My Lord Mayor, I will happily alter what I said. One of the organisations of which he is in charge is in a lot

worse state than that. If he wants a private discussion later, I will happily have it with him. I always know my facts before I open my mouth.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: I hope additional time will be added, Lord Mayor, but perhaps Councillor Atha would like to have a conversation with his Leader, who is more than aware of the matter we refer to.

Let us try and move on, Lord Mayor. Again, to the newer members of the Labour Group, it should strike you that in the two years that Councillor Atha was the front bench spokesperson in your group for leisure, not on one single, solitary occasion did he bother to telephone me, speak to me, come to me on any matter. Not a single one.

I might say that my office door revolves on a regular basis with most of your other colleagues, Councillor Atha, including your Leader, I am very pleased to say, who I think I have got a reasonable working relationship with. I think it is important to discuss some of the most important matters that affect my portfolio on a frank and open basis. I just wish that I had had that working relationship with you.

You, as some of your colleagues have tried to do today, drag in other things. Quite what the South Leeds Sports Stadium has got to do with Woodhouse Moor I am not sure, but just for the record let us be absolutely clear. The reason the South Leeds Sports Centre is currently closed is because the Government withdrew £800,000-worth of funding at the last minute when the tenders were out for refurbishment. That is the truth of the matter, that is the fact of the matter, Lord Mayor. Councillor Gabriel shakes her head. That is the truth. See the papers, read the papers that we have and that is the position we are currently trying to work through.

Lord Mayor, what Bernard did not make any comment on was the important element within this amendment that talks about the Parks Renaissance Programme. I think I am supremely fortunate as an Executive member to have been supported by Councillor Harris and Councillor Carter and Councillor Blackburn as well and all of our colleagues in investing a record sum of money into our parks within the city. £3m.

COUNCILLOR DRIVER: Can I ask as a point of order whether this is relevant to this debate? It is not about parks.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Lord Mayor, I am talking about parks and yet more time added please. Thank you. None of the members opposite seem to even flicker an eyelid when we talk about the £3.2m that has been invested in parks. Again I heard, "Not very well." I am sorry, but have any of you actually seen any of the work that has been done in parks? Where have you seen it, Suzi? Where have you been along to see it?

COUNCILLOR ARMITAGE: Manston Park.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: When we actually opened the Manston Park refurbishment, the day that we were there, Councillor Carter and I were there, there were people walking through Manston Park – some of them elderly, some of them young with pushchairs - saying what a fantastic job we had made of Manston Park. Whether things are subsequently vandalised is another matter and that is something that we need to tackle urgently. It is not appropriate to simply moan on about everything that is done.

Let us just look at Woodhouse Moor then. Why were the proposals brought forward in terms of Woodhouse Moor? They were brought forward because that is what people, people who we were talking to, certainly me and ward members, that is what they requested. I had a call yesterday, funnily enough, from a gentleman – if you do not believe me I can supply his name to you – who was complaining about the lack of car parking provision at Woodhouse Moor and the fact that he cannot go to the bowling pavilion and bowl and carry his woods with him and he wants local parking facilities. That is true, that is a recurrent theme that I and ward members had heard. I have to say, that is why the proposal came forward.

You might also add, as I understand it, this is not again a brand new proposal that no-one has ever floated before. It was a proposal that was around in your time as well. The difference is between what we are doing and what you only ever dreamed of doing is that we are backing some of these important issues to try and find a resolution.

However, in terms of Woodhouse Moor, what we should be clear about is that if people do not want it and people did not want it, we will say OK, fine, we will not do it then. There is no great big secret about that. It is a bit like the Sports Centre issue in the east of Leeds. If people do not deserve £10m of investment in East Leeds in your mind, that is fine, that is absolutely fine. We will not deliver these things there, but let it not be said, Lord Mayor, that we are not seeking to deliver in every part of this city, not just in the east as it was at one point of time when Councillor Moody was there, not just in the South when Councillor Trickett was there, not in selective little areas of the city seeking to funnel all of the money. We are seeking to improve areas right across this city with this Parks Renaissance Fund. That is what it is doing.

Again, many of the people who have benefited in their area from Parks Renaissance, I notice they are quiet, quietly sat thinking, “Well actually we have got quite a lot of money out of this and we have done quite well”, because that is the fact and I am pleased about that. That is what we should be doing.

Councillor Harris gave an absolutely categorical, unequivocal assurance to the Executive Board when members were there from the Woodhouse Moor deputation. He clearly, clearly stated that that was it, fine, off the table, no further proposals, nothing through the back door, nothing coming sideways at it. You do not want it – that is fine. The money will actually go back into the greater pot to look and see what we can do on other schemes.

Separate to that – and again Bernard, it must be that you are so annoyed that you never did any of this yourselves. Where was the lottery bid under your administration for this particular park? I am talking about this particular park now. Bernard, I am gracious enough to thank your administration for putting in those lottery bids. It was clearly the right thing to do, just as what we are seeking to do here, just as what we are seeking to do at Middleton as well is to support a lottery bid there as well. That is what we are seeking to do.

That is what it says and frankly, Bernard, you demanding under the Freedom of Information, as you have done today via your group office, all of the relevant papers in relation to this bid, I have to say it is just going a little

bit over the top. The motion clearly talks about – clearly talks about – our intention to submit a bid and that is what we intend to do, that is what we will do, that is what we will work up with local people because we are committed to working with local people on the ground to improve their communities wherever they may be. Whist that might stick in the throat of some members, that is what we are pledged to do, that is what we are committed to do and, Lord Mayor, despite Councillor Atha, that is what we are going to do.

COUNCILLOR HAMILTON: We should be clear that we are talking about a very specific scheme here which was the provision of a car park on part of Woodhouse Moor. Not in the park itself, not tarmac over grassed areas. It is actually an area of the park known as Cinder Moor, some people call it Monument Moor, which already has a hard surface.

That bit, if you like, was new. That is the new part. What is not new, as Councillor Proctor quite rightly says, is the concern that there is a lack of parking on Woodhouse Moor and the idea that something should be done about it. That is expressed in documentation which has been public for several years which was produced by the previous administration, so let us be clear about that. All this proposal did was to actually say, we are going to do something about this, we are going to try and come up with a scheme that addresses it now.

Fine, the scheme proved to be unpopular with residents and so it was dropped, but let us be clear where the idea came from. It was not an idea that was dreamt up in the last six months. It was actually an idea that came several years ago.

Bernard talks about subterfuge and I think subterfuge is an interesting word to use. It is as if we have been trying to keep this proposal quiet. It would be nice if we had been able to keep it quiet, quite frankly, because it was a very difficult time over the last few months with lots of e-mails flying around. We could hardly be accused of keeping the issue quiet. In fact my colleagues in Hyde Park and Woodhouse put out a press release early on welcoming the scheme, so I think to accuse us of subterfuge is rather a bizarre thing to do, quite honestly.

You also, Bernard, mentioned some paper I apparently saw in June 2005. I do not know what paper this is. I really do not know what paper you are talking about. The only papers that I have seen in relation to Woodhouse Moor are the papers that have gone to the full Area Committee, so if I have seen them, you have seen them. I am sorry, that is the answer you are going to get on that one.

The other point you made was in relation to the timing of this and the election. Of course, the easiest thing for us to have done would have been to say right, this is not a popular scheme, we are going to scrap it well in advance of the election and then who knows, perhaps the election result in the ward might have been better for us.

What we actually said was no, we must listen to local residents, we must actually let them see the plans. We had not seen the plans. We all wanted to see the plans and then make a judgment based on those plans. We raised a couple of consultation sessions, one of which was before the election, one of which was after the election. After the consultation session a decision was made to pull the scheme.

It would have been far easier, obviously, to have pulled the scheme a month before the election and then it would have all blown over, but we did not do that because we felt it was important that people actually saw in detail in black and white what the scheme was about.

Finally, Lord Mayor, a couple of final comments. I think we need to remember what the record of the previous administration is on Woodhouse Moor. This scheme clearly was unacceptable to members of the public and it was dropped – fine, but at least we tried to address some of the issues that were being raised.

I made enquiries three or four years ago about doing something very small on Woodhouse Moor and what was the answer I got? I am sorry, we cannot afford it. We cannot do anything about it. That was actually working with Michael McGowan to try and get something done on the moor because the moor is, of course, between our two wards. Frankly, nothing happened. We have had the bowling pavilion. It was burned down, it has been derelict for six or seven years. We are actually going to sort that out. We have actually got money from the Area Committee that is going to be spent to do that up. That has been on the agenda for six or seven years. It has taken this administration to actually sort it out.

The other thing, people have been crying out for the issue of vehicles driving on the park to be dealt with for years. We introduced the fence, so it has all very well quibbling to say we steamrolled a scheme that no-one wanted. We did not because we stopped it but at least we are trying to address some of the issues on that park and with the lottery bid, which I very much hope will succeed and will be in full consultation with residents we will be able to deliver far, far more.

Finally, Lord Mayor, Bernard accused Andrew Carter of steamrolling this scheme through. I think nothing could be further from the truth, actually. In fact, after the consultations I wrote to Councillor Carter as Leader of the Council asking on behalf of the Area Committee, on behalf of the ward members of Headingley and Hyde Park and Woodhouse for the scheme to be withdrawn. I finished the letter by saying that Labour in Leeds had quite rightly been criticised in the past for their failure to consult and above all their failure to listen to those we represent. I think this administration is better than that. Councillor Carter responded saying that the proposal Woodhouse Moor we agree should be scrapped. It was scrapped, we listened to people. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HUSSAIN: My Lord Mayor, I would like to support Councillor Proctor's amended motion. Let us make no mistake about it, I think for the previous administration like Councillor Atha to accuse the members of not listening to their residents' views - it was precisely because ward members listened, we consulted the public, that the car park was scrapped.

In contrast the previous administration were responsible for a series of blunders. They were wrong and the public told them so and they tried to add spin or find other ways of burying their heads in the sand and continue with the projects anyway.

Just to give you an example, the International Pool and, of course, let us not forget the Roundhay (*inaudible*)

We consult with local people, local groups and just for the benefit of Councillor Atha, there were formal consultations with the local communities and these took place on 22nd April and 9th May. You will recall that because these events confirmed what had already occurred through ward members, that the community was not in favour of such a plan. (*inaudible*)

In addition to that furthermore, my Lord Mayor, I would also add that this administration has always spent unprecedented amounts on parks and others in the Hyde Park area. Let me just give you some examples. You will recall the Woodhouse Moor fence, the playing fields on Lawns Park School and also improvements on the Alexander Park. I am sure that this administration will continue to invest in our parks and green spaces in all parts of our city and will also consult with all residents about proposed future plans. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Can we have silence on all sides, please. Left and right have been talking and disturbing the speaker so, without picking on any side, please, silence.

COUNCILLOR HARRIS: Lord Mayor, it is astounding that Bernard Atha gets up and begins his speech on his White paper by accusing this side of the Chamber of histrionic theatricals and saying that we are bringing the whole thing into disrepute and that it cannot go on like this.

Let me remind Councillor Atha that at the last full Council meeting before the AGM, your entire group left the Chamber en bloc on the most spurious grounds and refused to participate in a most important debate on the issue of a strike affecting our employees and the people of this city, and you accuse us of histrionics.

Let me remind you that in the middle of last year when we debated that future of Supertram, which was of critical importance to this city, you got up and left the Chamber and it was only when I asked the Minute to record the fact that the Father of the Chamber had left, your Whip caught you up and made you sit down again. Do not start accusing us of histrionics. Look at your own house and put that in order before you start lecturing the rest of us.

As regards this, I take exception to the suggestion that somehow we have now tried to slip this matter in through the back door. That is pathetic, frankly, and it is all part, as I have said many times and earlier today, of this subterfuge of half truths, of trying to portray things to the public when it is completely untrue. John Proctor said that what I said at Exec Board that if you want to check with Freda Matthews and many others from my e-mails they can be published with pleasure and you will see that I gave an assurance that no decision was going to be made until there had been full consultation and once it was clear I gave an assurance that that matter was finished, and so it is.

For you to embroider it again with this half truth that what we are really after is letting the dust settle, slipping it through the back door because we are after the revenue, is absolutely atrocious.

Earlier on today there was a debate about the Miles Hill School and you cannot have it both ways. In that debate you were saying we refused to tell the truth before the election because we were courting public popularity.

Now you turn it the other way round. Now what you are saying is we were scared. What is it you are trying to say? Actually the truth is we courted unpopularity before the elections and I will tell you the Hyde Park and Woodhouse Councillors came to me before the election and they said, "Look, do you think this is going to cause us trouble in the election?" and I said to them, "It may well do but the course is set now, we must follow it through and we must wait for the consultation and we must take the consequences", and that is what we have done, for heaven's sake.

If we are guilty of anything, it is maybe misjudgment. If we are guilty of anything it is because we refused to accept that anything is set in tablets of stone on this side. You may call it a weakness. I call it a strength. This is a constant, moveable feast. There is information coming forward all the time which affects the judgments we have to make and that is the point. We refused to say no, that is the way it was so that is the way it must always be. That was your approach to being in control. Our approach is to listen and listen again.

Yes, sometimes when the public say to us we have got it wrong, we put our hands up and say we accept that you are right and as a consequence of that the big thing, the adult thing to do is to accept it and to change the decision. That is what we have done here and you have the temerity to criticise us for that. Frankly, that is pathetic. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR A CARTER: I suppose as the steamroller of the Parks Renaissance Programme I should comment. I think it is envy that for 24 years they singularly failed to invest in our urban parks.

I will tell you, warts and all, how the programme came about. For some considerable time, long before we took control, I believe that most of the areas outside the centre of Leeds and areas that got funding from other sources other than from the Council were not getting investment into some very basic amenities – parks being one of them and the towns and district centres being the other.

Yes, it certainly was my idea to put to Cabinet that we had a £10m programme of funding from capital for town, district and village centres. Let me tell you – and if this is being a steamroller I gladly plead guilty – I think quite a lot of officers were not too pleased about it, because it was not the priorities they were used to getting from you lot.

With Councillor Harris and Councillor Proctor and a number of others we said no, hang on, we invest in all the city. Of course the areas of most deprivation get the most investment, of course they do, but you do not leave communities out. If you want to listen, Bernard, you might learn something. I know at your time of life it is difficult, but try.

As part of that we decided that parks should figure as a major beneficiary. We decided £2.5m should be allocated for parks and I have to tell you, there were even more officers who were not particularly happy about that, but it was an administration priority. So, to the extent that we said we want to invest in the services in every area of the city, yes, I plead guilty to steamrolling that through and I am sure that Councillor Harris and Councillor Proctor, who helped me with the steamroller, would equally plead guilty to that.

Because we are not like you lot and we did not doctor the programmes to make sure the funding landed in the places we liked, we said to the officers, you must have a list of priorities. This is Parks Renaissance. The Department of Parks and Countryside brought to us what they believed were the urban parks – we are talking about the urban parks, not what I would call the major city parks, and of course we want to continue investing in those as well. They gave us their priorities and I cannot recall that we made any changes whatever. They programmed the work in what year it would fall, they identified the parks most in need of investment.

Those parks – and you mentioned Pudsey in a very snide sort of way. You have your opinion and I have mine. I will say it again - a very snide sort of a way. In fact, Pudsey is represented by three Labour Councillors and Pudsey Park is an exceptional park in the city. I will mention Morley, where the members for Morley were delighted and had a major input into the investment into the Morley urban parks. The members for Otley were the same. The members for Horsforth – yes and my own ward, absolutely. The members in Crossgates, the members in Garforth, the members in Kippax, the members in Armley. The programme stretches across all the parks.

As one of your members said to me not too long ago, “How have you found the money? Our lot said they never could.” Isn’t that the nub of it? Isn’t that the nub of it, that you just could not - you never had the determination to drive the programme through.

Bernard, Woodhouse Moor was on that list and as soon as soon as it became obvious that local members and to me that this project was not wanted by the residents, it went. The same would occur anywhere else with any of the programme in any part of the city. They rely on the public being in support and your attack on the ward members quite frankly is beyond anything. Your display today has been a disgrace. From the minute you started on Roseville to your horrible, horrible personal attack on three members earlier on.

Let me just tell you something about the ward members. Another project which we have done in Little Woodhouse, Councillor Ewens, we got some investment into Woodhouse Square which you had singularly neglected, when Councillor Ewens and I went round the area with Freda Matthews, who was delighted – who was delighted – with the interest the new administration were taking in that part of the city.

Bernard, jealousy, it reeks out of your every pore. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Carter, thank you.

COUNCILLOR MORTON: I was one of the residents of the area around Woodhouse Moor that was not very happy about this and the fundamental problem, Bernard, if you are wanting to score political points, which is the job of an opposition, it is literally what you are paid for, fine, but the central weakness of what you have put forward is the criticism that we did not listen. If we had not listened we would be here today defending this scheme and pushing it through. The point is, it was dropped.

As somebody who was not happy with it, from me putting in private and eventually publicly my opposition to it, as did the other two Headingley ward members, there was about seven days gap between the two. This has been a very, very fluid process.

If you want to turn up and say it should not have been made in the first place, maybe we could have consulted earlier, there are all sorts of procedural flaws, how do you say no decision was taken when a planning application had been made – I am not going to stand here, and hope nobody else would, and say that there were not a whole lot of holes that you could pick in this process, but the accusation you have made is that we did not listen, and we did. That is just point number one.

Can I just use the rest of the time if it is OK – or even if it is not – to actually talk about Woodhouse Moor and some of the problems it has got at the moment, because there is a capital deficit and it was Councillor McKenna made a very brave and very pertinent contribution a few meetings ago and described what you would call the benign neglect in all our parks that had gone on for an awfully long time.

On one level Woodhouse Moor has experienced that. There is not a lot wrong with it. It is just if you spend 90% or 95% of what you should rather than 100% over a 25 years period, a lot of things get worn out and I am very hopeful that Parks Renaissance and the lottery bid which some of us have been talking about for a long time, will begin to put some of that right.

However, there are other management issues and this is what I wanted briefly to address. This is an important point and it may upset everybody. This began over five years ago. The old Headingley wall boundary ran along the north of the park. It was a primary piece of green space for a lot of our residents and about five years ago its very rapid decline began.

First of all you would have barbecuing. If one person burns a whole in the grass that is just not a problem. If 20 people do it, if 100 people a day are doing it over the whole of the summer, you go to Woodhouse Moor now and you will find huge parts of its surface have been ripped off. There was the issue with car parking – first one, then ten, then 50, all with noise and nuisance.

Then you would have bonfires and now if you go on a Friday or a Saturday night, you will find what you can only describe as bonfires – four, five, six of them – burning all night, branches being torn off trees to fuel it and as you have probably heard the phrase ‘broken windows theory’ – if you do not fix the window that is broken straightaway, you encourage other vandalism. If you do not clean the graffiti off straightaway, your graffiti problem gets worse. If you tolerate minor antisocial behaviour like this, things get worse.

On a Friday or Saturday or Sunday now you will quite commonly on Woodhouse Moor see performance level equipment being brought in, radio stations are having impromptu parties, quite clearly category A drug use and drug dealing going on. I will get letters from people saying, “We do not want to use this park any more.”

I first raised this under the previous administration and was bluntly told – I have to say by the police as well as by officers – “We have no resources, we would like to do something. Maybe you are exaggerating it” and maybe at first I was because I could see where it was going, but if you do not nip these things in the bud they get worse and they get worse and eventually you hit crisis point.

I am very pleased that tomorrow the first of a series of meetings that are going to try and address this will take place. We have finally hauled the police on board, senior officers are going to attend. We have had a very unfortunate incident recently with a huge amount of uncollected rubbish on the moor has finally been ignited and it is an exciting time for the moor, Bernard, and I hope somebody through the Area Committee – because I understand the Area Committee is now going to drive this process – that you might want to be involved, given some of your previous experience.

The problems on Woodhouse Moor did not start in April. I am not going to defend the proposal for this car park because I was against it. It has lasted a few weeks, we have had consultation, it has been withdrawn and what I am now saying is that the whole agenda of reclaiming this park as a public space, making it safe for families to go back in, has to be driven forward.

So, the first part of your attack we can blunt because it is not true, we did listen, and the second part I hope we will blunt – and you can come back and judge us if we do not – is by trying to turn the situation in this park around. If we do not then I will join you in saying that is not good enough in due course, but please, if you are going to make those kind of accusations I think certainly for a lot of us the tone of it just is a little bit too much. I have lived in that area a long time and I do care about it as well. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR EWENS: I would like to say that as a new member two years ago I was approached almost immediately by people complaining about people driving on to the moor where the old ladies, the children, the picnicking families were put into considerable danger. I said but for a long time I know, because after all I did know people who are now my colleagues before I was elected, I did know that they had been hoping that there would be a fence on the moor for quite a long time.

So, I approached the department, because I was new and I needed to learn and I said, “Can’t we have a fence round the park, because we have got all these cars?” and they said, “Well, yes.” So, four months after we were elected we got a fence.

The next thing I said – because I actually care about people – was, look, an awful lot of people who come here and who are wrecking the edge of the grass and cluttering up local streets, where will they park? This is a problem. I met with the department and I finished up, I went to the university and I said, “Can you help us out with parking because at the weekend there is a lot of space round here?” and all I got was an offer of one little lot of spaces for cars whose number I supplied. That did not seem worth it, considering the amount.

However, they did supply me with the Woodhouse Moor Management Plan which was published in 2004 and in which it talked about parking problems and where they might be solved. One of them was the place that finished up the cause of all the row.

It is a beautiful plan. It is *this* thick, it is gorgeous. I have now arranged for Friends of Woodhouse Moor to have a copy so they can see what has been proposed, presumably with the connivance of the previous administration. (*Interruption*) Shut up, Richard. Here we have a plan put up to improve the park.

We talked about it and I said, “This has got some brilliant ideas in it. How do we carry them out? Where does the money come from?” There is money, hopefully, 106 money which will come from a planning application which was approved in outline under the previous administration which has now been approved properly and progressed and there were members of the opposition who were with me when I went on that site visit, so we have that money which will come.

We have money from other schemes within the area and when I discussed with people where does the money come from, they said, “We can look for matched funding, we can apply to the lottery, we can apply to the Lottery Heritage Fund” and these were things I needed to learn, as a new member, so I put myself out to go and learn them.

I then found we have a beautiful book which Freda Matthews gave me as a Christmas present which is all about the parks, which I told the parks people about and they have read it and are very impressed and, within about six months of our having been elected, we produced a tabloid – it was not called Focus but it was a tabloid Focus, shall we call it – and on the front page it said, “Improvements to Woodhouse Moor. This is what we would like to see. What do you think?” Not a peep did we get from anybody until this lot came up and this was a result because I had said what happens to the people who could no longer park to come to somewhere they want to park? The fact that things are going wrong now because we have had bonfires on and this, that and the other, I have now been to the police about it, I have been to Street Scene to try and make us a 24/7 city as far as cleaning on a place that looked like that at the weekend and I just hope that the work that goes on that David has already referred to will lead to a satisfactory and speedy conclusion. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR ATHA: Can I say to Penny and her other colleague, I am sorry if you have had your feelings disturbed but unfortunately we are playing politics and politics is about achieving your objectives that you actually believe in.

I will give you full and total credit for believing in the scheme that you espoused at the time. You were open about it later on when it came out, you had it on your website that you were in favour of this scheme. I know you were. I respect you for that. What I said when I was speaking earlier was this. If you had stuck by that and said, “That is what we believe and we are going to go for it because we think it is right”, you get the respect for that. It is when in the seven days you mentioned, Councillor Morton, that magic seven days, you did not mention what was between those two end dates and it was the election.

The election arrived and the effect of that election result was pretty electric on us all because we were amazed at the result and people on your side were clearly aware of the impact that decision was going to have and that is where the politics came in. That is why Councillor Carter prepared a statement before the Executive Board saying the thing had been dropped so immediately the Executive Board had made a decision and e-mails could go out all over the place. That is the bad side of politics but the inevitable side that people will in fact behave like Councillor Carter did.

So, let us not fall out over this. You believed in something, you had the courage to go for it. Do not then blame us for saying that you changed

your mind because you may not have done because the election result was unfavourable.

Councillor Morton, again, respect him greatly. Why? Because he made his views known about this particular scheme long before, as soon as it became known. The community associations, they got to know about it in March/April and yet Councillor Hamilton and others on the inner committee must have known about it in June 2005. That is why I refer to secrecy.

(Interruption) All I can say is, talk to your officers because, as I say, if the facts are challenged I am prepared to call them and they have got the e-mails from them too. So we may share e-mails.

If I can go back very rapidly over the rest, because it is so awfully late. When I called Councillor Carter a steamroller I was not referring to his rather ample proportions. I was referring to the fact that his leadership is very strong and if in fact he wants to achieve an objective and an aim, he damn well gets ahead and does it. That is a compliment, Councillor Andrew Carter. It is something we may not like when we are in front of the steamroller but if we are behind it and it is going in the direction that we want, we are very happy.

When we took over this rather unusual situation for us, Councillor Carter, I said something which I remember the words absolutely pearly marvellous – almost as gorgeous as the plan you referred to. I said that if you do things right we shall doubtless tell you yes, we agree with that and we support it. If you do things wrong we shall say exactly what we think.

You have talked about the Renaissance. I think that is great. I am prepared to give every credit for it and give you every credit for going round the parks that needed attention and are getting some attention, so yes, we will accept that because we are not afraid to say what is right because really all we want is to make things better for the people of Leeds. It does not stick in your throat. This is where you are so silly, Andrew. You cannot honestly believe that people have honest beliefs but your colleagues can, so I am not really bothered about you. We would prefer to see you in making the parks fine than fail. We would prefer to see you cutting the grass effectively and not fail. Why? Because we live in the city and this is our city. Do not come that rather silly attitude which does not fool anyone, not even, I think, yourself.

Councillor Hamilton, I have dealt with the secrecy bit and we have exchanged words about the e-mails. I think the only other thing that I remember was Councillor Proctor. If you remember he spoke – you may not remember because it was totally unmemorable – it was difficult to remember – but he did start by saying and talking about all kinds of things other than his amendment. When he came to the amendment, he did say to me, “Why did you not talk to me?” Quite frankly, I remember a conversation with him walking out of a building and I was telling him about things he ought to know and he might not know and I said, “I have told Councillor Carter because Councillor Carter has been getting exactly the same briefing that I have been giving to Councillor Wakefield.” This was about a big development in Leeds which I will not specify. If you, in fact, are pulling a funny face, it is because we do not know when it is a funny one and when it is not, but you appear to be indicating. I can prove that I sent you all three briefing notes that I sent to Councillor Wakefield about a major scheme which means this city has signed a blank cheque for what may be millions.

That is the truth and if you challenge me on the truth, then by God I will produce them, but it will be to your embarrassment.

When I was telling Councillor Proctor this walking round, he said, “Why didn’t you come and talk to me?” I thought, it is because I am talking to his boss and not to the lad. So, I would have talked to you willingly. *(Interruption)* I am not really bothered. The fact of the matter is, Councillor Carter...

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: He’s got the chop and will never have it again.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I think there is every likelihood of having it again. I think next year.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: You have been demoted from the front bench to the back benches.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: I have been thinking of retiring for the last 50 years. I shall carry on thinking about it.

COUNCILLOR J PROCTOR: Get on with it, then.

COUNCILLOR ATHA: No, Councillor Proctor, because quite frankly when pompous people like you get up, someone has to puncture the balloon and it is my pleasure and the pleasure is all to see you punctured. With those few kind words to my colleagues – and I meant to get up and be so emollient. Thank you, Lord Mayor. *(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Recorded vote.

(A recorded vote was taken on the amendment)

91 members present, 52 in favour, 5 abstentions and 34 against.

(The amendment was carried)

THE LORD MAYOR: We now move on to the substantive motion.

(A recorded vote was taken on the substantive motion)

91 members present, 52 in favour, 5 abstentions and 34 against.

(The motion was carried)

ITEM 13 – WHITE PAPER MOTION – REFURBISHMENT OF SPORTS CENTRES

COUNCILLOR FINNIGAN: Thank you Lord Mayor. Under Standing Order 14.10, I request to withdraw this White Paper Resolution. *(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Does Council agree on that? AGREED.

ITEM 14 - WHITE PAPER MOTION - SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

COUNCILLOR GOLTON: Thank you, Lord Mayor. Unfortunately the news is not quite as good as Councillor Finnigan but what I can say is that the length of the motion is in inverse proportion to the (*inaudible*)

First of all I do know that there is a lack of an amendment from the opposition on this one so I am hoping that in the spirit of the local works agenda that the opposition will be hopefully supporting the motion at the end.

The overriding theme of this motion is that local people know what is best for their communities and the principle that it seeks to promote is that decisions about the future of local neighbourhoods should be bottom up and that because they have not been directed from on high, that they should not suffer a lack of funding from the centre.

Ironically, this principle seems to be finding favour with national Government. My friend Ralph Pryke has already mentioned the issue of double devolution which has yet to have some flesh put on it but it looks like the Government is quite keen to send direct funding to local communities to decide what they are going to do. Unfortunately we think it is some way of trying to bypass the Council but you will be glad to know that the motion before you put forward by the Local Works Pressure Group actively ensures that local Councils are at the centre of formulating those plans for local communities.

This agenda will place us in a key position to enable them to realise their plans. Double devolution that we talk about with Government has already happened here in Leeds with devolution that has started not just with this administration but from the previous administration as well. We are all aware of what CITs and Area Committees have done for us and of course in Morley and in places like Horsforth and Otley town Councils play a really important part in making sure that local priorities actually get put into place.

What is hopefully going to come out of this particular motion is that we will be able to build on that devolution that already began under the Labour administration, has been built on under our administration and that we can strengthen Area Committees as has been noted today by Councillor Carter and under the lead membership now of our new member, Judith Chapman, who will bring a fresh approach to it and we can actually build on some of the successes that we have had.

I have up until now only had appreciation of what happened in North West Leeds and the way that the Area Committees have worked there has ensured that issues that might not affect the entire city but do affect very seriously certain local communities actually have been addressed by the central body politic and I want to just point to the pressures that are on area from the presence of having a large university. Previously it managed to get ignored. Under various committees those things were able to be raised, brought to the forefront and policies actually brought through. It is a success and that should hopefully be able to be built upon with this new agenda.

Councillor Carter is also moving from the Town and District Centres Programme £10m. The reason why this administration wanted to ensure that this money came forward was because our centres are a focus for our community. It is not just in terms of copying facilities but also as a centre for communities to congress and to meet each other. They have suffered neglect in recent years and have had multiple set backs. We have had a

motion this evening about post office closures but that is just one element. On top of that we have had bank closures, we have also had brewery takeovers, we have had loss of smaller shops, we have had supermarket competition closing down many neighbourhood shops and, of course, that has led to empty premises and the resulting antisocial behaviour, which is why we cannot just talk about the standard agenda in terms of throwing money at some things and talking about physical facilities. It is literally about allowing communities to build their own communities in the nature that they wish to see it happen.

To enable that to happen we need to ensure that the funding does come down. If it means fitting in with Government policy so that that double devolution comes down to our areas, we are more than willing to work along with that, but they should not try and dismiss the elected and therefore accountable element which should mean this Council in terms ensuring that those priorities are sent to Government and that they are held to account for delivering that back to the communities.

On that, Lord Mayor, I will sit down. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: The next Councillor to second this motion is Councillor Luke Russell. Please note that it is his maiden speech and if you could extend the normal courtesies to him, please.

COUNCILLOR RUSSELL: Thank you very much, Lord Mayor. Fellow Members of Council, Councillor Golton has already made an excellent case as to why we should support this motion. I would just like to add why I think we should support this motion and the Sustainable Communities Bill.

We have all experienced the loss of vital local facilities such as post offices, local shops and public transport services. We all want to stop this process and, indeed, reverse it where possible. The Sustainable Communities Bill provides us with a process to persist in this. As Councillors it gives us something we want more of – the ability to make decisions that affect our local communities in partnership with our constituents as opposed to someone in Whitehall who by their own admissions cannot be as well informed as someone who is part of the community.

So it is with great pleasure that I second this motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Because of the time of the evening I am not going to speak tonight but Councillor Golton was right that we will be supporting this.

COUNCILLOR McARDLE: Lord Mayor, we have talked a lot about pockets and mainly pockets of deprivation and in supporting this motion I will just add that to create sustainable communities and cohesive communities, what this Council really needs is the resource to do it and that has to come from central Government. We all have pockets of deprivation in all our areas. We have quite a few in Morley North. We need the cash from central Government to actually carry out this bill. Thank you.

COUNCILLOR GOLTON: My Lord Mayor, I am warmed by the positive whole-hearted response from all sides and I leave it there.
(*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Can we have the vote on the motion? (*A vote was taken*)

(*The motion was carried*)

ITEM 15 – WHITE PAPER MOTION – ‘OLDER BETTER’ STRATEGY

THE LORD MAYOR: That is the last agenda item number 15, which is White Paper Motion of ‘Older Better’ Strategy. I was invited to that strategy a couple of weeks ago, one of my very first engagements, so I was proud to be associated and I know a bit about it so you cannot waffle!

COUNCILLOR HARRAND: When Members of Council arrived this afternoon – several years ago – to this meeting, one of *these* was on the desk. Please read it. Thank you.

THE LORD MAYOR: That is what you call a gentleman. Please can we carry on.

COUNCILLOR LANCASTER: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I will be brief but I want to take this opportunity really to thank the contribution that our older people make to the city. A lot of them have second careers and go on and do a lot in the voluntary sector, so I wanted to make that point. The other highlight, just to say that in April 2006 the Department of Health published a new ambition for old age and this sets out the second stage of implementing the national service framework for older people. In particular this document prioritises the need to ensure all older people are treated with dignity when using health and social care. This is an issue that the Scrutiny Board Health and Adult Social Care has expressed an interest in exploring this matter further in Leeds. On that note, I will sit down as well. (*Applause*)

COUNCILLOR HARRISON: I wish to withdraw my amendment.

THE LORD MAYOR: Does Council agree? All agreed. Thank you. Councillor Harrand to sum up.

COUNCILLOR HARRAND: Brilliant speech, Brenda, brilliant speech, Andrea. Thank you.

THE LORD MAYOR: So can I call on the vote on the motion in the name of Councillor Peter Harrand? (*A vote was taken*)

(*The motion was carried*)

THE LORD MAYOR: That concludes today’s Council business. Thank you very much and we will see you again, Members of Council.
(*Applause*)

The Council rose at 9.20 p.m.
