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To: All Members of Council

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Dear Councillor

COUNCIL MEETING – 16th OCTOBER 2011

At the above meeting, the thirty minutes of Question Time expired with questions 12 to 29 unanswered. Council Procedure Rule 11.6 requires that each Member of Council is sent responses to such questions.

Q12 Councillor Gabriel to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Housing and Regeneration) - Is the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing & Regeneration as relieved as I am that the Government has finally enabled us to move forward with the Little London, Beeston Hill and Holbeck PFI Regeneration scheme?

A It is very good news that the government has allowed the Council to progress with its appointment of a Preferred Bidder for the PFI housing scheme. This has come after a number of significant delays to the procurement process, which have come at a cost to the Council and the bidder, both of whom have demonstrated a major commitment to the project through very difficult times. There is still work to do to ensure the final details can be agreed and the contract signed but the start of works cannot come quickly enough. This is a very significant investment that will improve the homes and housing estates of two of our most deprived areas, provide jobs and training for local people and have a major impact on the city as a whole.

Q13 Councillor A McKenna to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Please could the Executive Member for Children's Services provide an update on progress with the award winning Leeds Children's Mayor competition this year?

A This programme is an excellent initiative which engages young people in local democracy and gives them a chance to have their say about the issues they care about.

Year 6 children aged 10 and 11 from schools across the city are asked to write a short manifesto outlining what improvements they would like to see in the city. They also design a poster to promote their idea. The best ten entries are short-listed and a city-wide vote of young people is then held.

It is a programme that transcends partisan boundaries and it is great to see that it has been supported by councillors from across the chamber this year. I would particularly like to thank Councillors Robinson, Matthews and Jarosz for working with members of the Leeds Youth Council to shortlist the candidates down to the 10 finalists.

I would also like to give my thanks to the Lord Mayor for hosting the finalists at an event here at the Civic Hall where all the young people got a chance to read out their manifesto and the winner was announced. All the finalists also got certificates and a memento of their achievement as well as having a tour of the Civic Hall.

At a time when we hear so much negativity in the press about young people it is really refreshing to see projects like this which show that given a chance young people care deeply about their communities and want to make a positive difference.

It is also great that the competition has one national recognition – being highly commended by the MJ magazine as an innovative example of how local authorities can engage with young people.

This year the competition has been more successful than ever with over 3,300 votes – a record number for the 6 years the competition has run.

The winning entry was from Joe Smith who goes to Strawberry Fields Primary School in Garforth. His manifesto was titled 'When it comes to keeping kidz active – Leeds Leads' and included ideas about how to improve young people's fitness.

His first act as Leeds Children's Mayor was to attend the Christmas light switch-on with the Lord Mayor – which is a great reward for the hard work put in to his entry.

He will also have the chance to present his ideas in a deputation to council in January. This year we have changed the name of the competition from 'Mayor for a Day' to reflect the year-round activities that will be taking place.

Staff in Children's Services and Democratic Services will continue to work with all the finalists to see how their ideas could link with current initiatives with the Council. These included the issue of parking near schools, litter, recycling, road safety and giving young people a say in making decisions.

I'm sure everyone around the chamber will continue to support this worthwhile initiative as it helps to contribute to our ambition of making Leeds a truly child-friendly city.

Q14 Councillor Robinson to the Leader of Council - Following comments made at the Labour Party conference will the Leader of Council inform us of how many Leeds businesses his administration have identified as 'predator' businesses this year?

A As Councillor Robinson will be aware, we have not identified any businesses in Leeds as 'predator businesses' rather Executive Board at its November meeting agreed a new Economic Growth Strategy. This identified key sectors where there was significant potential for future growth – such as the health and medical sector, and/or where the sector is already of major importance in providing jobs for the people of Leeds – such as the retail sector. The Strategy also identified Social Enterprises as having an important role to play in the future economy.

One of the aims of the Council in its relationship with business is to ensure that Leeds' companies are engaged with the Council and with the communities within which they operate. The success of the Leeds Community Foundation and Leeds Ahead for example, and the support they receive from local businesses are illustrative of business commitment to the City.

Q15 Councillor Downes to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Can the Executive Member for Children's Services tell us how she is progressing the Council's 'obsession' with looked after children?

A As Councillor Downes will be aware from the regular reports presented to the city's Children's Trust Board, on which he is of course a member – there is good city-wide buy-in and a range of work underway to intensify our efforts to reduce the number of children and young people in Leeds who are taken into the care of the Council and improve the quality of services for them.

In line with the outcomes based accountability methodology that we are using to measure our performance in this area more effectively, we now produce a regular 'scorecard' for this area of work.

The numbers of looked after children in Leeds has increased only slightly in the past year compared to the significant increases in the number of referrals coming into social care, demographic change and the challenges facing families in the current economic climate. This is a result of the increased rigour and challenge we've put into our decision making processes before we take a child into care. We know that the rise in total numbers of looked after children is not a result of more children entering care, but rather that those entering care are remaining in care for longer.

So our challenge is to turn the curve and start to make significant inroads to bring the numbers down – as members will know this area continues to be one of our most significant financial pressures.

To oversee this, a task and finish group, chaired by the Chief Officer for Strategy, Commissioning and Performance on behalf of the Director of Children's Services, is overseeing all strands of this 'obsession' programme plan. A Project Manager has been deployed to ensure activity is timely, coordinated and delivers outcomes, the programme plan is reviewed weekly to monitor delivery and impact. This work is looking across the full range of areas where we can do more:-

- Better early intervention to prevent the need for children and young people to come into care.
- Targeted support to those on the edge of coming into care and those ready to leave care.
- Improving our capacity to support more children who are in care *in Leeds*, therefore reducing the significant costs of placing them outside the local authority.

We're underpinning this by looking at the review, decision making, performance management, budgeting and communication work we do that supports this.

We are doing this whilst ensuring that we always do what is necessary to ensure children and young people are properly safeguarded and supported.

This remains a very challenging area to 'crack'. But we have the commitment, methodology and focus across the city to do this and I know that as corporate parents all elected members will want to support this work.

Q16 Councillor Akhtar to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Would the Executive Member for Development and the Economy please update Council on the progress of the arena development and associated works at Woodhouse Car Park?

- A I am pleased to advise Members that work on the arena continues to progress on budget and to programme, with the anticipated completion date for the base build in March 2013. Allowing a period for SMG the operator of the building to fit out the venue, it is anticipated that the arena will be fully operational by July 2013.

Members may have seen reports in the press that a major project milestone was recently achieved with the successful lifting into place of the 180 tonne proscenium arch truss, which will allow the erection of the first roof truss to commence next week. Early in the New Year when the structural frame of the building will be in place, the construction works will enter a new phase when the mechanical and electrical works commence on site, opening up employment opportunities to new construction disciplines.

With regard to works to the Woodhouse Lane Multi Storey Car Park, Wilmott Dixon the contractor undertaking the improvement and maintenance works commenced on site on 19 September. The works are currently on budget and on programme and are scheduled for completion in December 2012. Throughout the construction programme, it is intended that the car park will remain open to the public, providing at least 800 car parking spaces (of the total 1,234 spaces) during the period of the works.

- Q17 Councillor Lowe to the Leader of Council - Would the Leader of Council please give his views on the Electoral Commission consultation currently taking place into the arrangements for the elected mayor referendums due to take place next year?

- A The referendum that is due to take place next year on whether the city adopts an elected Mayor will have a huge impact on the governance of this Council for years to come. As such it is only right that local residents are able to make a fair and clear choice. That is why I was glad that the Government saw sense and decided not to impose undemocratic 'shadow Mayors' before people had a chance to vote.

However, a new concern has arisen about the question to be used in the referendum. The initial proposal is for a long and convoluted question as follows:

'How would you like Leeds City Council to be run?

Leeds City Council should be run by a Leader, who is an elected Councillor chosen by other elected Councillors. This is how the Council is run now.

Or

Leeds City Council should be run by a mayor who is elected by voters in Leeds. This would mean that the way the Council is run would change.'

This is not a simple yes / no question we are familiar with in referendums and does not meet the Electoral Commission's own guidance which states questions should be:-

- Presented simply and neutrally.
- Be easy to understand.
- Be to the point.
- Be unambiguous.
- Avoid encouraging voters to consider one response more favourably than another.

A much better question would be to simply ask: 'Do you support the proposal for a directly elected Mayor for Leeds?'

It is also concerning to see the Government issue a consultation on powers for elected Mayors – before they have even been created. The implication is they are trying to bribe voters into adopting their favoured system.

Q18 Councillor Cohen to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Can the Exec Board Member explain why Leeds City Council is running a monopoly which ties in use of the non traded service Infobase, which is essential for schools, with its outdated Leeds Learning Network, punishing schools for making free choice of better and more affordable network providers?

A Leeds Learning Network is a forward thinking service that represents very good value for money. 98% of schools have signed up to Leeds Learning Network for three years and in terms of developing it, there are now focus groups established where schools can help shape the service going forwards. For those schools that don't wish to use the Leeds Learning Network, access to Infobase is still possible through one of several means, including either a secure ADSL link (broadband circuit) into the Council's network, or through a standard Leeds City Council PC installed on site, connecting in turn to the Council's network through a local broadband service and a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection. This is the way many Council staff securely connect to council services from remote sites, eg, home or satellite offices. Officers are happy to work with schools and settings that want to know more about these alternatives.

Q19 Councillor Bentley to the Leader of Council - Can the Leader of Council tell me how many members of staff are employed under historical life long pay protected contractual hours arrangements?

A The Council have 104 employees who are categorised as in receipt of life long pay protection. The circumstances of the protection arrangements are individual and therefore the protection could be for a number of hours or total salary, depending on historical arrangements made at the time the protection was agreed.

The 104 employees will be predominately individuals from across the whole Council with the largest numbers in Corporate & Central Services (36) E&N (29), Adults social Care (17) and City Development (14).

Q20 Councillor Marjoram to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Will the Executive Board Member for City Development tell me what the legal status yellow zig-zag lines outside schools in the city have?

A The yellow zig-zag lines marked outside schools is, according to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002,(TSRGD2002) ' part of the carriageway outside a school entrance which should be kept clear of stationary vehicles.' If solely the marking is present then they have no legal status, unless the Police determine that any vehicle stopped on the marking was causing an obstruction.

If the marking is supported by a sign indicating 'No stopping', (as detailed in the TSRGD2002), there is a legally enforceable Traffic Regulation Order in operation which can be enforced by either the Police or the Civil Enforcement Officers from Parking Services.

Q21 Councillor Bentley to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Can the Executive Board Member for Development and the Economy explain why the Council has rejected using a brine solution to spread salt on the highways during freezing weather?

A The Council has periodically reviewed the costs and benefits of moving from it's current system of winter maintenance salt spreading to deal with ice and snowy conditions. Brine or pre-wetted salt has benefits in terms of reducing salt use and helping the salt to stick. But it requires a significant investment in specialist plant and storage to keep the salt in the right condition. The cost of this is in the region of £1.6m and the pay back period is around 11 years. The service will keep this option under review in the context of current budget pressures.

Q22 Councillor Fox to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Housing and Regeneration) - In respect of the Outer North West area of LWNW Homes, could the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Regeneration advise the Council the average length of waiting time for calls from tenants to be answered at the Contact Centre for each of July, August and September?

A The Council's Contact Centre has a dedicated team which provides the first point of contact for telephone calls in relation to general tenancy matters, rent collection housing repairs etc for each of the ALMO's in the City.

There is a dedicated telephone line for each of the ALMO's and various statistics are available in relation to call volumes, speed of answer etc for each of these lines. The technology is not able to break down the calls into sub areas within each ALMO. The statistics available therefore cover all calls received by the ALMOs. There is no evidence to suggest that any sub area of the WNVH ALMO would have different performance results or would vary from the figures quoted below

In relation to the months of July, August and September of this year the Contact Centre answered calls for WNVH during normal office hours as follows:-

Month	Calls Answered	Average Speed to answer
July	7,442	16.03 minutes
August	11,033	7.32 minutes
September	10,556	8.33 minutes

In addition calls were answered by the Out of Hours team for WNVH as follows:

Month	Calls Answered	Average Speed to answer
July	926	1.54 minutes
August	726	1.39 minutes
September	815	0.46 minutes

The above figures for the daytime operation are clearly not to the standard we would aspire to nor not what we have delivered in previous years.

Call handling for WNVH and Aire Valley Homes has been impacted by the implementation of the new contractual arrangements for housing repairs in these areas.

There have been some service delivery issues and system related issues which have led to extended call lengths and longer than normal queuing times.

Council officers have been working with and continue to work in partnership with the ALMO's and the contractor to resolve some of these implementation issues and to improve the service offered generally. Additional resources have been made available to the contact centre.

Whilst there is still some way to go to returning to normal service standards, improvements have been achieved during the year. Thus the figure for October was 10522 calls answered with an average speed to answer of 5.66 minutes.

Difficulties have been particularly apparent in relation to calls around missed appointments and incomplete repairs. It has been agreed that calls of this nature will be handled directly by the contractor and this change is to take effect at the end of this month.

Q23 Councillor Pryke to the Leader of Council - Could the Leader of Council comment on the proposed industrial action by the Trade Unions scheduled for the 30th November, and explain whether or not he supports the Trade Unions actions in calling for the strike?

A It is now looking increasingly likely that 30th November will be a day of industrial action across the public sector.

I hope that the Government will come up with the right offer before that date so that the inevitable disruption it will cause can be avoided.

Whilst I regret that it has come to this, I have a great deal of sympathy for staff who, facing an unprecedented attack on their pensions, feel that they have no alternative but to show their feelings through the withdrawal of their labour. No one takes this step lightly.

The vast majority of local government staff who are affected by these proposed pension changes are low-paid workers who carry out some of the most fundamental roles in our community. These are the staff who look after the needs of vulnerable adults and children in our community; they are the staff who empty our bins, clean our streets and maintain our roads; they teach our children and they serve in our libraries; they look after our parks and protect our environment. They carry out some of the most important roles in our city to ensure the very fabric of our society is maintained.

Public sector pensions have been portrayed in a very negative way in some parts of the media and by some politicians. How often do we hear talk of “gold plated” pensions in the public sector. The truth is that the vast majority of these staff are low paid workers; in Leeds City Council around two thirds of our workforce are paid less than £21,000 a year. They have received no cost of living pay rise for two years, and with inflation running at more than five per cent, they have seen a very real reduction in their standard of living. It is not surprising that they now feel aggrieved that the value of their pension is also being hit. A pension which for the average Local Government worker in this country amounts to no more than £5,000 per year.

Of course I am well aware of the very serious economic situation that Britain is facing at this time, and I know what a difficult challenge this presents all of us. It is therefore inevitable that public sector pay and pensions will come under some scrutiny, but what the Government has proposed is not the right answer, and I do hope that before November 30 they can come up with a better offer which balances the workers’ expectations of a decent pension with the needs of the economy, and which avoids this unwelcome disruption to public services.

Q24 Councillor Cohen to the Executive Member (Children’s Services) - Will the Executive Board Member for Children’s Services explain what impact the closure of Squirrel Way Children’s Home in Alwoodley will have on other similar homes in the city?

A All staff from Squirrel Way Children’s Home have been successfully redeployed into other Children’s homes in Leeds, in this way the homes have benefited from the support of experienced residential workers.

Some children from Squirrel Way were successfully moved into other Leeds children’s homes as vacancies arose. We have not increased the capacity of our existing homes

and would be unable to do so under Ofsted regulation, homes have therefore not been placed under additional pressure.

A review of all Children's Homes is currently underway. Although unexpected developments can occur at any time, it is not our intention to close any other home in the short or medium term.

The children's home review will consider assessed needs of our children, staffing, buildings and location. Regimes used within our homes will also be considered.

The review is monitored by the Corporate Carers group who receive regular progress reports.

In the event of a proposal to either close down or open a new home, Ward Members will be consulted at the earliest opportunity.

Q25 Councillor Matthews to the Leader of Council - Does the Leader of Council still agree with me that members of the public are regularly being put at unacceptable risk in Headingley as a result of irresponsible private hire drivers illegally plying for hire?

A Since this question was last raised with Council in July 2011 there have been a further 8 test purchase operations carried out by Taxi Private Hire Officer resulting in a further 14 Private Hire drivers licenses being suspended. Four of these offences were detected in Headingley on Otley Road.

Previously in 2010 there were 25 Private hire drivers prosecuted for plying for hire as a result of test purchase operations mounted by LCC Enforcement Officers working with Officers from West Yorkshire Police, their licenses were revoked in line with the Council's Plying for Hire policy. Twelve of these drivers were found committing the offence in Headingley.

Q26 Councillor Marjoram to the Leader of Council - Would the leader of Council provide an update on the Bike to Work scheme and confirm when contracts with independent bike shops will be in place?

A Bikes to Work promotes the cycling agenda by using a tax-efficient salary sacrifice scheme, but advantages to employees have been eroded by HRMC tax changes and the Council has had to take stock here.

Early this year a procurement exercise was started to re-tender the bikes to work contract. In parallel a review of opportunities to extend other tax efficient benefits for staff was undertaken.

Rather than re-tender Bikes to Work alone, a preferred option is packaging this with other contracts, eg child care vouchers. It is also intended to include staff discount/loyalty schemes which could benefit many local businesses as well as staff.

Currently work is underway to start this procurement exercise which should still be in place for 2012. Whilst a single contract will be in place, the option to allow local cycle businesses to be sub-contracted under an overall framework will be considered in the specification. Meanwhile the Council is still offering a bike loan scheme whereby bikes can be purchased from (local) providers of choice.

Q27 Councillor Matthews to the Executive Member (Environmental Services) - Does the Executive Member for Environmental Services accept that the late night noise nuisance service needs serious improvement?

A We will be undertaking a range of long-lasting improvements to the noise nuisance service that were not addressed by the previous administration and which are long overdue.

Q28 Councillor Marjoram to the Executive Member (Resources and Corporate) - Will the Executive Board Member for Resources tell us what the cost, including the cost of staff time spent away from duties, of Diversity Month is?

A The Council's Business Plan 2011-2015 is underpinned by a clear set of values. One of these is 'treating people fairly'. As an organisation we are committed to treating people fairly and valuing our diversity, tackling discrimination and fostering good relations across the city. We also want to be an excellent employer with a flexible and motivated workforce who clearly demonstrate our values.

For Diversity Month different activities were developed ranging from workshop type sessions to activities staff can undertake in their workplace or in their own time. The programme was developed to help line managers and staff understand the needs of our staff and the different communities across Leeds.

The costs for Diversity Month are £591.58 which has covered, for example, the costs of printing posters to ensure staff who work remotely and do not have access to email were given the opportunity to participate and for inclusion costs, such as, the provision of British Sign Language Interpreters.

Costing of staff time has not been carried out as we do not have details of the salaries of those staff who attend. To date 4 workshops have been held and 46 staff have attended. A further 6 workshops are due to be held between the 16th and 30th November. All workshops run by partners from the Third Sector have been delivered and hosted for free.

Q29 Councillor Townsley to the Executive Member (Leisure) - Does the Executive Member for Leisure believe that all Members should be kept aware of all information on matters of public concern, and can he explain why his letter to Labour Members on the 1st November regarding the Yorkshire Libraries and Information Council included information that had not been provided by his Officers to the Liberal Democrat Group, despite requests from Cllr Golton?

A The Music and Drama service provides access to music, drama and orchestral scores to groups within the Yorkshire and Humber region. Usage has been falling steadily over a number of years and the lead authority Wakefield is facing significant issues as they have to vacate their current premises next year.

To continue the service there needs to be significant investment and long term commitment. This would require all the authorities to support this otherwise the financial burden would fall to the remaining authorities. Leeds is not in a position to provide this degree of financial commitment and has argued the need to find other solutions. There are a number available and we argued that these should be made clear to groups.

For music and orchestral scores there is a comparable service available which has similar costs paid to Wakefield by the music groups of the city. This is available from Hull and others.

For drama the situation is less clear cut, although there are alternative suppliers around the country the costs of borrowing are much greater for the groups. We have therefore proposed that the Drama collection is gifted to Leeds and we manage it.

We have also suggested that reservations that Leeds groups have already made for music or drama material for next year are honoured. This could be achieved by the items being given to Leeds.

We have also registered our concern about the way this has been communicated with groups as we feel it has caused unnecessary concern. We believe our proposals should mitigate issues for Leeds groups and if accepted create a sustainable future for the service.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Tomkinson
Principal Governance Officer