



Democratic & Central Services

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To: All Members of Council

Dear Councillor

COUNCIL MEETING – 11th JULY 2012

At the above meeting, the thirty minutes of Question Time expired with questions 12 to 25 unanswered. Council Procedure Rule 11.6 requires that each Member of Council is sent responses to such questions.

Q12 Councillor Walker to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Would the Executive Member for Children's Services care to comment on Michael Gove's reported intention to scrap GCSEs?

A Whilst these proposals are not at a formal stage – they have not been endorsed by the coalition and would be subject to much more consultation- they do raise some initial concerns.

Our ambition is for every child to reach their full potential and have the same opportunities as their peers to do so. It is important that any exam system supports this and avoids the potential of a two tier system being created.

Thousands of pupils across Leeds have recently taken their GCSE's, the most important message we can send to them is that they have our full support and should do their absolute best to give them the choices and opportunities for a bright future.

Any significant change of this nature would require very detailed consideration and we would work with Leeds schools to look at this fully should the proposal gather more momentum.

Q13 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Environment) - What actions has the Executive Member responsible for Grounds Maintenance taken with the new contractor to address their current non-compliance, in parts of city, with the current contract?

A Continental started the new Contract on 1st January finishing off the winter maintenance programme. The standard of work delivered by the contractor was good and demonstrated their ability and commitment to providing a quality grounds maintenance service across the city on behalf of the Council. In terms of grass cutting, Continental were keen to ensure that they achieved the best possible start to the contract and worked with the Council to be as

flexible as possible in terms of the first grass cut. The first two cuts went as planned and as expected considering the facts that it was their first season with many new staff and crews unfamiliar with areas.

Continental have struggled on occasions to cut the grass at the desired two week frequency and in recent months this has been exacerbated by the unusually wet weather conditions. June 2012 has been the wettest June on record. The wet weather creates access problems for the machines (ie wet soft ground), the wet grass slows down the mowing process and the outcome is wet grass left in clumps rather than dry grass being evenly distributed across the grassed areas. The appearance give the impression of a poor quality of service.

In addition, the ALMOs have accepted that the quality of grass cutting around sheltered housing complexes could be improved by increasing the frequency of cuts. In these areas the contractor has been asked to provide a weekly grass cut (as opposed to fortnightly) up to the end of the grass cutting season.

The existence of grass with spring bulb foliage in it has created the impression of uncut grass. The contract requires that grass with spring bulbs is not cut until the bulbs have had the opportunity to replenish which usually takes until about June. In addition, recent guidance from the HSE regarding cutting grass on steep slopes has created an issue in some areas.

The above issues have been addressed in the following ways,

LCC response:-

- Close monitoring to ensure that service quality issues are identified quickly and referred to the contractor for a quick response. Any contract non-compliances passed back to the contractor that are not rectified will result in a contract performance deduction and to date contract performance deductions have been calculated each month.
- Close liaison with the 'In Bloom' groups to re-assure them that the service will be provided in their areas in accordance with an 'In Bloom' summer schedule provided by Continental.
- Regular communications to elected Members, Parish and Town Council's and ALMO Board Members, updating on the progress of the grounds maintenance contract.
- Attendance at Area Committee environmental sub groups to update regarding the performance of the grounds maintenance contract and answer any questions.
- Attendance at tenants and residents groups and forum meetings to update regarding the progress of the grounds maintenance contract and to answer any questions.
- Working with the Contractor to address the banking areas and ensure that they are cut safely.
- The ALMOs have asked the contractor to cut the grass around sheltered housing complexes more frequently up until the end of the grass cutting season. The impact of this will be reviewed and influence the frequency of cuts in these areas next year.
- Highway Services are also reviewing the frequency and specification of cut on some of the highway verges especially those adjacent to arterial routes. Where appropriate, the frequency is being increased.

Continental's Response:-

- Continental have recruited three further teams to increase productivity and deliver a two weekly cut cycle.
- Existing staff have been offered overtime working to help to increase capacity to achieve the two weekly cut.

- Quality issues relating to staff behaviour and performance have been dealt with through improved training, initially, followed by formal disciplinary action where appropriate.
- A commitment from Continental's Operations Director that the 'In Bloom' process is treated as a high priority and every effort has been made by Continental to respond to issues in the in bloom areas.

LCC and Continental continue to work closely to respond to issues and complaints that are raised and deliver a sustainable outcome.

Q14 Councillor Lay to the Executive Members (Adult Social Care and Health and Wellbeing) - Can I congratulate the Executive Members for Health and Adult Social Care on the 'integrated service' envisaged at Harry Booth House. This is exactly the type of provision we should be providing for older people and would also be suitable for the empty former Ward One at Wharfedale Hospital. Will they agree to work with me and others Members in ensuring the excellent facilities afforded on Ward One are utilised in the same way?

A I, too, am delighted to welcome Executive Board's go-ahead for the city's first-ever integrated health and social care facility at the old Harry Booth House. It's a landmark in the city's support for people who either don't need to be treated in hospital or who are leaving hospital after a short spell of treatment, and who need that extra bit of support before they are able to live independently at home.

It's a tribute to the collaborative working that is going on between the Council and the NHS. It points to a future where the two organisations move closer together to give Leeds' people the seamless service they deserve when they become older, more infirm or unwell.

Councillor Lay is quite right when he says that this is the kind of provision we should have more of across the city. We are indeed, with our colleagues in the NHS, seeking to provide at least two more intermediate care facilities city-wide and I would be happy to work with any Member who has an interest in helping us progress these plans.

Q15 Councillor G Hussain to the Executive Member (Health and Wellbeing) - Could the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing outline how the Council will use its new public health responsibilities to tackle the huge health inequalities which affect the city?

A The transfer of public health into the Council is both a challenge and a huge opportunity which we must grasp. We all know, as the Marmot report showed, that there are a huge range of factors which influence people's health in addition to the quality of clinical care. These factors include the environment people live in, the food they have access to, their household incomes, the lifestyles they lead and whether they are employed.

As a Council we can have an impact in all these areas – whether it be through housing, planning, debt advice, leisure or parks and countryside. Health really is everyone's business and that is why we have taken the decision to adopt a hub and spoke operating model for public health. This will see public health staff working across all council services and in local communities. To really maximise the benefits of this model we will need a culture shift so that officers are working beyond traditional departmental silos to maximise what we can achieve with the limited resources we have. We will also need to work hard to support the staff transferring across from the NHS and help them integrate effectively into our structures.

The prize if we can achieve this is huge with the prospect of real improvements in public health for people in the city and reductions in the huge inequalities in health outcomes. It is just not acceptable that people in the most deprived parts of the city die on average 12 years earlier than those in the better off areas and we must make sure we use these new powers to achieve the city's ambition of being the best city for health.

Q16 Councillor Dawson to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - The significant increase in usage (six fold increase in 8 years) of Morley railway station means the current car park and other facilities cannot meet current and future demand. Would the council be willing to work with partners to make improvements to facilities at the station?

A Morley station is currently used by around 328,000 passengers per year. This puts it mid-table in terms of station usage in West Yorkshire. The car park is amongst the smallest of those provided at WY stations with 15 spaces and therefore that around 70% of passengers walk to the station. The majority of station car parks suffer from overcrowding, with most full before the end of the morning peak, so Morley is no exception there.

The draft Metro Railplan 7, recently the subject of public consultation, identifies a range of possible improvements for rail in West Yorkshire which will need further assessment. This includes improving car parking and accessibility improvements as for further development of facilities at Morley station. As the Railplan proposals are developed within the Local Transport Plan the Council will work with Metro, rail operators and local partners to examine all the parking issues associated with Morley station to identify further measures and funding to improve the situation.

Q17 Councillor G Latty to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Following recent discussion at Plans Panel West would the Executive Board Member for Development and the Economy confirm if the planned negotiations with LBIA on improved pick up and drop off proposals for the Airport will include serious consideration of delivering a taxi rank on Whitehouse Lane?

A The discussions at the West Plans Panel were confined to Condition 14 relating to the development of the terminal building, ie, the Forecourt Management Plan. The delivery of a taxi rank on Whitehouse Lane is therefore outside the scope of these discussions.

The West Plans Panel will consider revised management plan proposals on Friday, 13 July 2012. Outside of the planning process we will continue to impress upon LBIA our view that there should be a permanent Hackney carriage rank as part of the airport's infrastructure.

Q18 Councillor J Bentley to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Would the Executive Member for Development give the Council an update on the progress of the consultation into the future of the West Park Centre?

A Consultation has completed, and 135 responses were received from a mix of local residents and people who use the centre. The findings of this consultation are being analysed and will be used, alongside other information, to inform a report about the future of the building as part of the options appraisal which will be provided to the Executive Member before a decision is taken.

The options being considered are whether we retain the whole building and increase usage; partial demolition of the existing building and reinvestment in the remainder; full demolition and rebuild a smaller centre on site; and, full demolition with services moving to other accommodation in the city. I expect the results of the work to conclude in the early Autumn with a final decision taken later in the year.

Q19 Councillor Dawson to the Executive Member (Environment) - There is concern that not enough is being done to combat illegal Dog Fouling in Morley. Can the Executive Board Member for the Environment please inform Members of the work the Council is doing to tackle dog fouling in problem areas of Morley?

A Over the last twelve months (July 2011 to June 2012) the Council has dealt with 147 requests for dog related services in the Morley area, 42 of which were for dog fouling, and 2 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued for dog fouling in Morley in the same period.

In the last three months, in response to reports from Councillors and residents in the Morley area, we have undertaken patrols in Lewisham Park, Dartmouth Park and Scatcherd Park, and on Scatcherd Lane, Denshaw, Newlands and Raylands estates.

In addition to this the issue of dog fouling has been included as a ward priority for Morley South in the Service Level Agreement for 2012/13 between the Locality Team and the Area Committee. This will mean that further, more intensive work will be undertaken in the area over the next twelve months including increased patrols within target areas, which should significantly increase the level of dog fouling prosecutions in the future.

At a citywide level we have made significant progress in increasing the number of staff who can both undertake dog fouling enforcement and gather intelligence to enable enforcement to happen. We have now trained all enforcement staff across the Locality Teams (around 50) to undertake dog fouling enforcement work. PCSOs have also received training in some NPT areas about the legislation to enable them to more effectively pass information for the council to take action. We will be rolling out this training to PCSOs in the other NPT areas, including Morley and are speaking to partners in Parks and Countryside and ALMOs about providing similar training to their staff in the near future.

In the meantime telephone contacts have been provided to all partners including the police for reporting any dog related issues, including dog fouling, for us to deal with.

We continue to publicise dog control legislation and enforcement arrangements and any prosecutions are always referred for publication by the council's press office.

Q20 Councillor Robinson to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Does the Executive Board Member for Children's Services believe that full consultation and engagement with local communities should take place before the opening of an independent children's home goes ahead?

A It would be very helpful and fairer on local communities if the process around opening independent children's homes became much more transparent, so the simple answer is yes.

It is encouraging therefore that the Government is reviewing this practice as part of a wider look at the current role of children's homes. I am also pleased that the Children and Families Scrutiny Board will be looking at children's homes this year and that officers have been in contact with Ofsted about this issue.

It is important to remember that this is a national issues and that Leeds, unlike some other areas, does not have a proliferation of such homes.

We must keep at the heart of these considerations the importance of putting the care and interests of vulnerable children first, which can only happen if there are good partnerships between everyone in a local area who supports their wellbeing. Any changes to the current system need to get the balance right.

Q21 Councillor S Bentley to the Executive Member (Leisure and Skills) - Could the Executive Member for Leisure and Skills outline what plans he has to take advantage of the Government's recent announcements of a package of measures to support a vibrant and sustainable public library service? In particular, whether he has any plans to automatically issue Library tickets to all primary school children?

A Many of the proposals are already in place in Leeds. Indeed, the library service already issues every baby born in Leeds with a library card. The library card is also a Breezecard and two years ago the service worked with the then Education Leeds to issue every school child a library/ breeze card.

We are now working with Sport and Children's Services to look at the future of this card and its distribution. Currently, 161,000 children already have Breeze/library cards.

Q22 Councillor Marjoram to the Leader of Council - Will the Leader of Council join me in welcoming the long overdue changes introduced by Government that will see prospective adopters act as foster parents before an adoption placement is confirmed?

A Any change that responsibly reduces bureaucracy in a way which makes more successful adoptions possible is a positive step forward. Adoption is a huge decision that can literally make a life changing difference to a vulnerable child.

There are potential benefits to putting this practice in place, but it can carry risks as well, for example if the prospective adoption broke down during the fostering placement this could make an already emotionally challenging situation more difficult.

So the important thing will be to look at what works best for each individual child's case and judge carefully how to manage this. I welcome any change that gives us the flexibility to ensure children find the right home, at the right time and in the right circumstances. I hope that these changes will support this.

Q23 Councillor Lamb to the Executive Member (Leisure and Skills) - Will the Executive Member for Leisure provide an update on the progress of the proposals for Garforth Leisure Centre?

A Following the latest meeting, the Schools Partnership Trust have indicated that the draft Business Plan will now be issued on the 16 July 2012.

Q24 Councillor Wood to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Will the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services provide more detail on how he intends to tackle sickness in 'hot spot' service areas to reduce the £10.7m in costs associated with staff absences?

A The Council has improved attendance levels each consecutive year since 2009/10. In 2009/10 we achieved 10.94 days against a target of 11 days. In 2010/11 we achieved 10.1 days against a target of 10 days. In 2011/12 we achieved a 0.8 day improvement compared with 2010/11, achieving 9.3 days against a target of 9 days. The Council sets out its target for sickness absence in its business plan. For 2012/13 the business plan contains a target of 8.5 days sickness absence lost per fte.

The HR attendance team is working closely with managers, the BSC, organisation development, health & safety and occupational health, to target its support to help managers in hotspot services which need improvement. Strengthening manager confidence when dealing with complex cases is being addressed through interventions such as coaching, briefings and advice. The attendance teams are targeting their support to hotspot service areas to support managers, this helps managers understand and fulfil their responsibilities in relation to managing attendance and improving employee well being.

Q25 Councillor Marjoram to the Leader of Council - Given the local interest in hosting a stage in a forthcoming Tour de France, will the Leader of Council instruct officers to begin work to bring more dedicated cycle facilities to Leeds, particularly for children, including a cycle speedway track similar to the facility opened last year in Sheffield?

A The Council continues to develop the Leeds Core Cycle Network. This is a network of 17, mainly radial, routes around Leeds that are suitable for novice cyclists and provide routes for commuting, school and leisure. Five routes have been completed and another three are scheduled for completion this financial year. The Council also seeks to improve cycle facilities

through non-cycle specific highway improvement schemes and by including facilities in major projects such as the A65 Quality Bus Initiative.

In addition, the Council is part of the Sustrans 'Access to Education' project, which has received Local Sustainable Transport Funding and is aimed specifically at school children. Its aim is to increase cycling levels in schools with the provision of small measures to improve access to the schools and by carrying out "Bike-it" cycle training. Four Secondary schools and their feeder Primaries will be targeted in Leeds.

There is currently a grass cycle track at Roundhay Park, with no further plans to create another permanent facility at this time.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Tomkinson
Principal Governance Officer