



**Democratic & Central Services**

Governance Services  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor (West)  
Civic Hall  
Leeds LS1 1UR

Contact Name: Kevin Tomkinson  
e-mail: [Kevin.tomkinson@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:Kevin.tomkinson@leeds.gov.uk)  
Direct Line: (0113) 24 74357  
Fax: (0113) 3951599

Your ref:  
Our Ref: A61/kjt/quest

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To: All Members of Council

Dear Councillor

**COUNCIL MEETING – 14<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2012**

At the above meeting, the thirty minutes of Question Time expired with questions 10 to 28 unanswered. Council Procedure Rule 11.6 requires that each Member of Council is sent responses to such questions.

Q10 Would the Executive Board Member for the Environment please update Members on the performance of our city in the Britain in Bloom awards?

A At the RHS Britain in Bloom 2012 Awards Ceremony, Leeds was awarded Gold for the 'Large City' category.

Leeds had a second reason to celebrate when they were announced joint-winners of the RHS Britain in Bloom Young People's Award. This award is given to the finalist(s) deemed to involve young people from across the community in the best way and this year went to St George's Crypt, in Leeds. St George's Crypt is a charity that has been providing care and support for homeless, vulnerable and disadvantaged people since 1930.

In addition to this, Kippax won Gold in the 'Urban Community' category.

Kippax also won 2 discretionary awards, Community Champion (Pat Samy) and Conservation and Wildlife (Townclose Hills). The discretionary awards are given out for specific projects that stand out from amongst the rest where the judges have been impressed.

Following the success in this year's Britain in Bloom Award the city has been invited to submit an expression of interest in being put forward for the Entente Florale Competition (for the European in Bloom competition) for 2013.

Q11 Councillor Robinson to the Executive Member (Adult Social Care) - Will the Executive Board Member clarify the administration's position on 'care ring' charges, opt-outs and what safeguards there will be for vulnerable elderly people?

A The consultation on proposed changes to some adult social care charges is drawing to an end, however representations are still being accepted. It would be premature to set out the administration's position on this until the consultation responses have been fully analysed. All concerns raised during the consultation process will be taken into consideration, in order to ensure any recommendations are as fair as possible. Any proposals will be considered by the cross-party advisory board, before they are taken forward to executive board before the end of the financial year.

Q12 Councillor Lay to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Can the Executive Member confirm that it is now Council policy for planning officers to advise Plans Panel members to ignore Planning Inspectorate decisions?

A No it is not. Planning Inspectorate decisions are material planning considerations to be taken into account in future decision making. The weight to be given will depend on the circumstances of the case, the context of the decision, and whether there have been changes in policy, procedure or circumstances since the decision was made which means that an alternative course of action is now possible.

Q13 Councillor Ingham to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Can the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services confirm the current position regarding the Yorkshire and Humber local authorities asylum support contract with UKBA?

A United Kingdom Borders Agency awarded the contract to G4S as the provider of accommodation and support for asylum seekers in the region. The Yorkshire & Humber Public Sector Group (Y&HPCG) contract ended on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

In partnership, a transition plan was agreed commence in July 2012 to enable the majority of families, and specifically families with children, to move within the school holidays. The planned end date for transition was the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

Transition has not been delivered to the agreed timescales across Yorkshire & Humber. At the start of the transition period 249 people were supported in Leeds.

As of the 12<sup>th</sup> November there are 104 people supported in Leeds.

The critical issue has been the inability to provide advice to vulnerable people and co-ordination preventing the statutory and voluntary / community sector services ability to respond; created by the failure to deliver of UKBA and G4s to deliver to plan.

Effective management arrangements remain in place through Housing Services to minimise impacts on the asylum seekers.

Failure of UKBA / G4S to deliver has reduced the inability to effectively and efficiently close down the Y&HPSG central management team and the Leeds Local Asylum Team. The costs have been mitigated by reducing operations and redeployment of staffing.

There is a growing concern that poor procurement and inadequate management and support by G4s and their sub contractors will lead to social cohesion issues and vulnerability for the customers.

At the height of the Y&HPSG Contract approximately 140 staff were employed across the nine local authority's delivering this contract. Currently there are 22 staff that would be subject to TUPE across the Y&HPSG. To date a satisfactory answer with regard for TUP has not been received; an invoice for the costs to all LA's will be sent to UKBA.

Q14 Councillor Charlwood to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Could the Executive Member for Children's Services please update Council on what the department is doing to combat cyber bullying?

A Bullying continues to be one of the most serious issues that children and young people face and we all have a role to play in helping to tackle it. Leeds has a track record on positive initiatives to tackle bullying, our anti bullying ambassadors programme has won the Diana anti-bullying award and we are continuing to build on this work by introducing more restorative approaches to resolving conflict in schools.

However, we know that cyber-bullying is a growing problem and that through mobile phones and social networking children and young people can feel victimised both in and outside of school.

As I am sure you are all aware we had a recent incident of cyberbullying in Leeds and indeed across West Yorkshire, with the "dirtiest secrets" Facebook pages, truly awful, vindictive and shameful pages.

As soon as we were made aware of this issue we took immediate action, liaising with the Police, Head Teacher representatives, legal services and the Integrated Safeguarding Unit to advise and support Schools in getting Facebook to remove these pages and how to advise and support parents and pupils affected.

A guidance letter was sent out to Secondary School heads and a letter was sent to Facebook from the Director of Children's Services. The pages were removed. The responses from the Headteachers whose schools were affected were extremely positive for the swift action taken and for the quality of the advice and guidance given.

Cyberbullying is a massive issue and one we are determined to do all we can to stamp out.

So we are working actively with schools to build awareness of the issues and equip staff, parents and most importantly pupils themselves with the understanding, skills and confidence to challenge cyber bullying behaviour.

- Building on the anti-bullying ambassadors we now have more than 150 cyber-mentors in schools who have been trained by the organisation 'Beatbullying'.
- Cyber-bullying training has been delivered to a number of schools who worked to produce a DVD and a script that other schools can use. Ten schools are being trained to deliver this programme in their own schools. The anti-bullying workshops have also covered homophobic and racist bullying.
- Our child protection officers offer training to prevent bullying and cyber bullying - tailored to the child protection training package for staff in schools

and settings. And our healthy schools and wellbeing service (a traded service) offers training for school staff on anti-bullying, including cyber bullying, linked with PSHE education. This training outlines best practice happening in schools, drawing on school case studies.

- We have started working with 'Kidzaware' a charity who undertake to reduce bullying and raise awareness of disability – they do direct work with classes in schools.
- And of course we are rolling out restorative practice training and approaches across more schools to equip young people to understand the consequences of their actions and resolve issues before they escalate.

We are also continuing to review new research and evidence around the forms and impact of cyber bullying and liaise with schools where this presents issues that we can learn from.

Cyber bullying is a serious challenge for us. There is a lot of positive work being done with and by schools to address this, but we need to make sure we stay aware of how this practice is changing and evolving as more and more young people have constant access to smart phones and the internet. This is a priority for children and young people and through restorative approaches and support we will continue working with schools to tackle it.

Q15 Councillor Lamb to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Will the Executive Board Member for Children's Services confirm when the West Park centre will be re-opened?

A As my colleague has highlighted, we need to make sure the building is in good order before we could consider re-opening it. We will have the results of the testing in the next week or so and depending on what we find we'll need to take a view then about the works required, the cost, how it will be paid for and the options going forward. Officers have been instructed to process this work as quickly as possible.

Q16 Councillor Downes to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - If the review of ALMO arrangements recommends major changes to current structures, will the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services arrange for a ballot of tenants on the new proposals?

A The Housing Review project team have undertaken to engage with as many stakeholders as possible during the first stage of the review, including elected Members, ALMO Boards and staff, Area Panels and tenants representatives, to ensure that any options developed are fully informed.

A full options appraisal will be undertaken and developed into an options paper for Executive Board on 9th January 2013. There will be further engagement following the Executive Board decision.

Q17 Councillor Dunn to the Executive Member (South (Outer) Area Committee Chair) - Could the Outer South Area Chair update Members on the area committee's response to fire service proposals affecting communities including Morley and Rothwell?

A Members in South East Wedge raised concerns with officers about possible closure of some Community Fire Stations in their area.

The report of West Yorkshire Fire Service outlining the proposed changes to West Yorkshire Fire Service, particularly to the Fire Stations of Hunslet & Morley and Garforth and Rothwell was presented to the 15<sup>th</sup> October Outer South Area Committee.

The meeting was attended by Ian Dunkley, Senior Operations Manager and Mark Allen, Station Commander, Morley and Rothwell who spoke to the report and answered questions. Members were informed of spending cuts that the Fire Service faced following the Comprehensive Spending Review and the development of an eight year strategy to address this. A major study had been carried out across West Yorkshire which had considered where to site stations and engines to minimise risk.

The Area Committee resolved –

- 1) That the Area Committee opposed the closures as outlined by West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue
- 2) That the area committee affirms its commitment to work together to reverse any decisions taken locally or nationally to close fire stations in its area and intends to write to local MPs and Leeds City Council seeking their support in doing so
- 3) That the Chair of the Outer South Area Committee submit a formal written objection to the fire station closures to West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue on behalf of the Outer South Area Committee.

Q18 Councillor Iqbal to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Would the Executive Member for Economy & Development provide an update on the recent Regional Growth Funding allocation for flood alleviation in the centre of Leeds?

A The Regional Growth Fund bid for £4m has been successfully granted subject to the positive outcome of a required Due Diligence process. The Due Diligence procedure must be undertaken by a third party independent of the City Council.

The bid is based on all three elements of the Flood Alleviation Scheme being undertaken, that is the movable weirs, the removal of Knowstrop Cut and the construction of low flood defence walls along areas of the river. The news of the RGF award in principle is positive progress towards our aim of securing flood defences for the city.

Q19 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Does the Executive Board Member for Housing have full confidence in the contractors charged with carrying out major adaptations and repairs in Leeds?

A The Council has had significant concerns regarding the ability of the current repairs and maintenance contractor, Morrison FS, to successfully undertake the repairs, maintenance and major adaptations service in the West North West and Aire Valley areas of the City. In response to these concerns, the Council has undertaken the following actions.

- March 8th 2012 the Council required the Contractor to produce a corrective action plan to improve service

- April 1st – June 30th 2012 – the Council and the ALMOs worked closely with the Contractor to improve processes and procedures.
- August 8th 2012 the Council placed the Contractor under a Performance Warning Notice in relation to their repairs service. The Performance Warning Notice period runs from Sept 1st 2012 to December 31st 2012.
- September 7th agreed with the Contractor that the Major Adaptations service will be transferred to the East North East Homes ALMO from 15th January

Following intervention from the Council and since the start of the Corrective Action Plan on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 the following improvements have been recorded in performance:-

Morrison have fundamentally improved and their performance on responsive repairs and customer satisfaction levels are now much higher. Plans are being put in place to transfer the major adaptations work to an alternative provider. Voids performance remains unacceptable and we are working hard with Morrison to improve this. Decisions on future provision of the voids service will be made in January.

To compensate for the lack of performance across the contract, deductions will be made and applied.

Q20 Councillor S Bentley to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Can the Executive Member for Children's Services outline what specific cuts of £200,000 or less have been made in the Children's Services Budget over the last twelve months?

A Like all areas of the Council we are making savings in children's services through looking to be more efficient across our work and the effective management of vacant posts. We have also made a major impact on the budget this year by turning the curve on the cost of placements for children we take into care. This is making a significant contribution to the overall children's services budget, and we are currently forecasting to come in within budget this year.

If the elected member has a specific area of concern or interest I would be happy to ask the Director to provide more specific detail.

Q21 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Does the Executive Member with responsibility for Highways agree with me that the Council should have an agreed policy position for dealing with damaged grass verges and also a policy on cars parking on grass verges?

A The Council has a policy approved by Executive Board in October 2005 for the maintenance of highway verges within the Highway Maintenance Policy Statement and Plan that was approved by the Executive Board on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2005. The policy deals with how damaged verges should be considered when undertaking highway maintenance. It also considers the wider issues of on-street parking and the desire wherever possible to encourage off-street parking to reduce the demand for parking within the streets.

Q22 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Does the Executive Member with responsibility for Highways agree with me that the Council should have an agreed policy for dealing with moss on pavements, as the current ad hoc situation is leading to further damage to the surface of pavements due to the limited treatments available using chemical methods?

A Highways and Transportation and Environment and Neighbourhoods agree that this is a difficult issue to resolve where it arises. It is a particular concern in a few residential areas across the city but overall is not a widespread problem. Whilst we need to establish joint working between departments to tackle moss on footways I am not sure that it is a sufficiently widespread problem to require a specific policy but I am happy to discuss this further with Cllr Anderson.

Q23 Can the Executive Member with responsibility for grit bins advise me why he has not published his policy and proposals for dealing with grit bins that have been funded by Area Committee funding or MICE money when the initial agreement to provide grit runs out?

A The Council's Highways Service has a defined set of criteria for the placement of grit bins on the Highway and currently maintains 1002 such bins from the Highways budget.

A number of other services also have grit bins on their premises for which highways supply the salt.

The Blue Grit Bins are funded in general using the Council's Well Being Fund or MICE money and are installed at locations identified by elected Members. All blue bins are in locations which do not meet the criteria defined by Highways.

Officers in Highways have made significant reduction in the cost of grit salt for blue buns and I have asked that they make all Ward Members aware.

Q24 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Development and the Economy) - Can the Executive Member with responsibility for Winter Maintenance advise Council of the enhancements and improvements he has introduced this year to the current winter maintenance policy?

A The winter Service plan is reviewed annually by the team who deliver the winter service. Towards the end of last winter we managed to obtain funding from the local NHS to purchase 4 quad bikes and 4 small towed gritters.

The funding was granted on the basis that we try to increase the proportion of footways in the city centre that are gritted on a precautionary basis. The overall aim being to try and reduce the number of slipping accidents. Whilst the NHS provided the capital to purchase the equipment the running and operational costs are the responsibility of the City Council.

Two routes have been drawn up which connect the Railway station, Bus station, General Infirmary and the University. This year will be a trial year so that we can establish how to make best use of the equipment, verify its effectiveness and establish the parameters which should be used to initiate the use of the quad bikes.

We have also been looking at how a 'Snow warden' type service could be introduced across the city. Some parish Councils have already started services which supplement those provided by the City Council and we will shortly be sending out an email to all Parish and Town Councils along the following lines:-

Leeds City Council Highways Services would like to trial a Snow Warden scheme in conjunction with Parish and Town Councils.

The idea of the scheme is to encourage local people to assist the Council in clearing priority locations at times of heavy snowfall, when our resources are particularly stretched and maintaining accessibility in areas we may otherwise be unable to get to.

Q25 Councillor J Blake to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - What sites under Leeds City Council ownership has the Council identified for use as new Free Schools in the City?

A Only one free school is currently operating from a Council owned site and that is the Lighthouse.

Of the four free schools approved for opening next year, three have their own sites. The fourth hasn't yet identified a site and we are supporting the group to consider options.

Free schools can ask for Council owned sites to be made available to them and we would hold discussions with anyone that has a serious proposition to put forward.

Q26 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Environment) - Can the Executive Member with responsibility for the Council's various publicly-owned woodlands advise me if he agrees that the lack of appropriate tree management/maintenance plans is giving the impression to residents that these types of issues are not important to his administration?

A Publicly-owned woodlands are very important to Leeds. The Parks and Countryside service was successful in gaining accreditation to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) in March 2012 and they are responsible for maintaining all our public woodlands.

UKWAS is an independent certification standard for verifying sustainable woodland management in the United Kingdom. It is based on 8 key criteria that are independently assessed, as follows:

1. Compliance with the law and conformance with the requirements of the certification standard.
2. Management planning.
3. Woodland design: creation, felling and replanting.
4. Operations.
5. Protection and maintenance.
6. Conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.
7. The community.
8. Forestry workforce.

In summary, the standard is a rigorous audit process and helps meet the various demands of residents, visitors and the management of biodiversity in our woodlands.

In addition, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that trees under its control are maintained in such a way that their condition or location does not pose an unreasonable risk to people or property. This legal responsibility is taken extremely seriously and, as such tree work is prioritised to ensure that budgets are managed effectively and that identified risks are mitigated within acceptable timescales.



Parks and Countryside has adopted an inspection and risk assessment approach based on allocating a category to each tree assessed which defines the timescale that work needs to be carried out. This in turn enables priorities to be determined in allocating resources to address issues identified via inspection.

Q27 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Does the Executive Member with responsibility for the Core Strategy agree with me and some of his own colleagues that the Council should define what it means by 'sustainable development', as per the recent advice given to him and a number of Councillors?

A Sustainable Development is a fundamental concept related to the achievement of economic, environmental and social objectives, at the same time – for the benefit of both current and future generations. The concept can be applied at a global to local level and is not absolute. The National Planning Policy Framework describes 'Sustainable' as ensuring that better lives for ourselves, don't mean worse lives for future generations and 'development' as about growth. With this in mind the NPPF sets out a wide range of considerations through planning, including building a strong and competitive economy, managing environmental resources, health and transport issues.

Given the concern from members I am happy to look at this issue again.

Q28 Councillor Marjoram to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Would the Executive Board Member please confirm the legal maximum length of a temporary contract offered by the Council to a temporary member of staff?

A There is no legal maximum length for a temporary contract

Yours sincerely

**Kevin Tomkinson**  
**Principal Governance Officer**