

**Democratic & Central Services**

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Date: 31 May 2013

To: All Members of Council

Dear Councillor

**COUNCIL MEETING – 8<sup>th</sup> MAY 2013**

At its meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2013, Council resolved that all questions would be responded to in writing. Please find below the response to each question:-

Q01 Councillor Buckley to the Executive Member (Health and Wellbeing) - Would the Executive Member responsible for Health and Well-Being wish to comment on the casual incompetence of the now defunct Primary Care Trust, which has caused the postponement or abandonment of the long-promised medical centre on King Lane, Moor Allerton?

A The difficulties in progressing a new medical centre in Moor Allerton are to be regretted. At its public Board meeting on 21st March this year, NHS Airedale, Bradford and Leeds PCT explained that whilst this area was a priority in its estates strategy, no formal business case has been forwarded by GP practices. The acting Chief Executive has stated that the primary care trust could not commit resources without a full business case to consider and approve. The PCT also stated that a further meeting would be held with the practices. With the ending of the PCT, responsibility for Primary Care development has moved to the West Yorkshire Area Team of NHS England.

Q02 Councillor Golton to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - What measures are the Executive Members for Adult Social Care and Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services taking to end discriminatory practices in housing policy against carers for older people?

A The Council's housing policy does not discriminate against carers for older people.

The Lettings Policy gives officers the power to award a housing applicant an additional bedroom, if they require a live-in carer or equipment/adaptations

taking up additional space. There is scope for officers to make decisions on individual circumstances and make intelligent lettings to meet an individual's housing needs. An emphasis has been placed in the updated Lettings Policy, which was approved by the Executive Board on the 24th April 2013, on ensuring front line staff have an effective understanding of how the policy should be applied.

There is scope within the Lettings Policy for officers to bypass housing applicants without dependent children in favour of applicants with dependent children, when allocating family sized houses and maisonettes. However, there is an exemption to this if the household without dependent children has a medical recommendation stating that they require a house or additional bedroom.

Q03 Councillor Lyons to the Executive Member (Adult Social Care) - Will the Executive Member for Adult Social Care please update Council on funding for Neighbourhood Networks?

A I am delighted to remind members of the Leader's budget announcement that in spite massive pressures on the Council budget, we have managed to find an extra £300,000 per year recurring funding for these fantastic organisations. It is a mark of the high regard this Council has for the workers and volunteers who give so much of themselves to help others.

The Neighbourhood Networks are one of the great success stories for Adult Social Care in this city, with their amazing support for older people who want to stay independent and remain at home for as long as possible.

One of the reasons why they are so successful is that they are inventive, they 'think outside the box' and are skilled at finding solutions that are closely tailored to the communities where they work.

The £300,000 is intended to help the organisations achieve even greater potential – and looking at the kinds of bids we are receiving from the Neighbourhood Networks, they will not disappoint. Already we are seeing bids from Networks who want to extend what they do in daytime opportunities for older people and in brokerage services to help people source the support they need locally.

It is great to see that bids are being submitted from Neighbourhood Networks working in partnership with each other and with other organisations. The power of partnership can help them achieve big things in our city.

Staff in our Adult Social Care commissioning section, are working closely with the Neighbourhood Networks to help them submit their bids. The deadline for submissions is 5 July and I would like to encourage all Members to support their Neighbourhood Networks in submitting bids so as to extend the range of services for our older citizens.

Q04 Councillor Ingham to the Executive Member (Environment) - Can the Executive Board Member for the Environment update Members on a collective switching scheme to help residents in the city save money on their energy bills?

A The Cooperative Energy Switch allows consumers to work collectively to reduce their energy bills. The larger the group, the stronger it's power to negotiate reduced energy tariffs. 6,762 households had signed up for the

scheme by the time registration closed across the 6 participating authorities. The scheme was originally scheduled to close on Wednesday 17 April but was extended to midnight on Wednesday 1 May to make sure as many people as possible could benefit.

If all 6,762 households switch and save £115 each, this will represent savings of £777,630.

Householders who have signed up for the scheme should have received an email, or should soon receive a letter detailing their personal saving calculation. People who have signed up for the switch have until midnight 24th May to review their saving and decide whether they want to switch.

Those with any queries about their personal saving calculation or the switching process can contact Which? directly on 01992 822 833, 9:00am to 6:00pm, Monday – Friday (excluding bank holidays).

We plan to run a second sign up later this summer and will be building on experienced gained during the current switch.

Q05 Councillor Lamb to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Will the Executive Board Member for Children's Services confirm what the full directorate budget is for transport?

A The proposed total budget for home to school transport for 2013/14 is £10,224,400.

Q06 Councillor S Bentley to the Executive Member (Children's Services) - Can the Executive Member for Children's Services tell me what plans were in place to ensure that all children having swimming lessons at Holt Park Leisure Centre were catered for when it closed?

A Staff at Holt Park Leisure Centre made every effort to relocate all children on swim lessons at other pools in the city. An offer of an alternative session was made to each child on the existing programme and the choice of whether to take up that offer rested with the respective parent/guardian. Nearly 60% of children on existing swim lessons took up the offer of an alternative class elsewhere, and this process began in June 2012.

Q07 Councillor Khan to the Executive Member (Leisure and Skills) - Can the Executive Member for Leisure update Council about the exciting Leeds Let's Get Active scheme which has recently been announced following a successful funding bid?

A On the 19th March it was confirmed that Sport England will be funding the project to a value of £500,000 and this is being matched in cash terms by Leeds City Council (Public Health).

This has given Leeds the opportunity to devise an exciting and appealing scheme that will engage with large areas of communities who have not previously been actively participating in physical activity.

The proposal is based on an adaptation of the successful Birmingham Be Active model, and is divided into 2 key strands. Firstly, a core offer of targeted free use of swimming, and for the first time, free use of our state of the art Bodyline gyms, both for between 1 and 2 hours every day, across all

leisure centres, focussing in areas of greatest health inequality, and to those who are currently inactive, and secondly, this work to be supported by improved health referral routes via the health sector and other customer service points, and by further activities in community settings.

The scheme will run from October 2013 to March 2015, and will help Leeds meet its ambition of being the “most active big city”, as well as reducing health inequalities, and importantly, will remove barriers that exist at the present time from the least active people in Leeds in relation to participation in physical activity.

Q08 Councillor A Hussain to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Would the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services provide Members with an update on how the HRA new build scheme is progressing?

A The HRA new build programme was approved by Executive Board in January. It will see the development of the first phase of new council housing to be delivered since changes in legislation allowed local authorities to manage their own Housing Revenue Account. Taking advantage of this opportunity, an investment programme has been developed which will see the delivery of around 100 new homes. It is the first time in a number of years that the Council has been in a position to make such a significant commitment to the provision of new council homes and this first phase of development is focussing on two issues, both intended to not only grow the housing stock but to enable the Council to make better use of existing properties. Firstly, addressing the issue of underoccupancy, particularly older amongst tenants where through providing attractive smaller properties, family homes can be freed up; secondly to increase the numbers of smaller units to meet the change in demand brought about by changes in the welfare benefits system.

The funding will be available over the next three years and the sites detailed in the report are currently being appraised to determine any technical constraints and from that the order in which sites could be developed. In the meantime work is underway with the design team at NPS to develop the specification for the new properties with a focus on good space standards and energy efficiency. The development team is working towards a planning submission for the first site in July/August, tendering the works during September/October, with a view to achieving a start on site immediately into the new year

Q09 Councillor Anderson to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) – Will the Executive Board member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services confirm the capital cost to the Council of his proposals to help tenants affected by the reduction in Housing Benefit for under-occupancy and also the revenue cost and loss of revenue that both the Council and the ALMOs would expect to have to sustain?

A The Council is responsible for ensuring that the level of rent chargeable to a tenant is appropriate for the property that they are occupying and in the determination of this a key factor is the number of bedrooms in the property. For a number of identified properties the Council is seeking to have them re-assessed and where appropriate they will be re-designated with the correct number of bedrooms that are in the property. There is no capital cost relating to the changes.

The re-designation of a property, which results in a reduction in the number of bedrooms, will not reduce the amount of rent payable.

The Council currently adheres to the rent restructuring policy of the Government which aims at Local Authorities and Housing Associations paying similar rents for similar properties in similar areas.

The Council does not intend to reduce the rent. The immediate impact is likely to be beneficial as tenants will be eligible for full benefits, resulting in less chance for rent arrears.

Therefore any rent loss from re-designating the property will only be realised as the property moves towards rent convergence. By way of example, re-designating one of the identified 5 bedroom properties as a 4 bedroom property would mean that rents could still continue to rise at the same rate as if it had been a 5 bedroom property until 2018/19 when it achieves rent convergence for 4 bedroom property. A reduction in the amount of rent realisable would then occur since the rent on the property would not be able to increase at a rate that would see the property converge with the rent on 5 bedroom properties. However these future losses would only occur if the Council continue to adhere to the Council's rent convergence strategy. The intention is to undertake a review of the Council's current strategy and the outcome of this review will be reported back to a future Executive Board.

- Q10 Councillor Lay to the Leader of Council - Recently a number of residents in Otley have complained about at lack of privacy when visiting the One Stop Centre in Otley Library. Does the Leader of Council agree this is unacceptable?
- A There has been a mixed response to the One Stop Centre being located in the Library. Many residents like the co-location, they like the modern facilities and say it is easier to access the Council's services. Some residents prefer not to be sat in the library discussing personal business. However more residents by far compliment the new facility than are negative about it. By co-locating smaller One Stop Centres with the local library it enables us to better join-up services; free up buildings for other uses or capital receipts; and helps us keep costs low to protect and sustain smaller One Stop Centre facilities. During 2012/13, 99% of residents said they received either an excellent or good service at Otley One Stop Centre.
- Q11 Councillor Hardy to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Can the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services update Members on the number of traveller encampments in Leeds?
- A The Council has applied a different approach to responding to unauthorised encampments of Gypsies and Travellers over the last two years and this has led to a significant reduction in the number and size of encampments. In 2012/13, there were 46 unauthorised encampments. The comparable figure for 2010/11 was 87 encampments – a reduction of 47%. The 46 encampments in 2012/13 comprised 293 caravans. The comparable figure for 2010/11 was 1002 caravans – a reduction of over 70%.
- The figures for 2008/09 were 126 encampments comprising 1164 caravans. The 2012/13 figures therefore represent a 63% reduction in encampments and 75% reduction in caravans.

The cornerstone of this different approach has been the provision of tolerated sites at Bath Road in Holbeck and the Primrose High School site in Lincoln Green. This has abated the cycle of encampment and eviction evident in previous years. The Council has continued to use its legal powers to respond to unauthorised encampments and the injunctions secured in Burley and Armley is evidence of this.

At the same time the Council has secured government funding of £1.074m to expand and £890k to refurbish Cottingley Springs.

Q12 Councillor Robinson to the Executive Member (Health and Wellbeing) - Given the responsibilities that the Executive Member holds for public health and particularly reducing the amount of people that smoke in Leeds, would the Executive Board Member for Health and Well-being care to comment on the £125m investment made in tobacco by the West Yorkshire Pension Fund?

A Tobacco is the single most significant preventable cause of ill health in the city. Reducing the harm caused by tobacco is a priority within the City Priority Plan.

The West Yorkshire Pension fund, administered by Bradford Metropolitan District Council has a Statement of Investment Principles. This includes a section on Socially responsible investment. This states:-

“Investment decisions are taken based on financial and commercial considerations so as to yield the best return by way of income and capital appreciation. If it is shown that particular types of social, environmental and ethical investment can produce at least comparable returns, then the Fund will invest in such companies as part of the normal investment process.”

The Council will continue to promote with the West Yorkshire Pension Fund alternative investments to the tobacco industry.

Q13 Councillor J Bentley to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) - Can the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services state how much rental income will be lost to the Council as a result of the proposal to reduce the number of bedrooms in some households affected by the introduction of social sector size criteria for housing benefit?

A The Council is responsible for ensuring that the level of rent chargeable to a tenant is appropriate for the property that they are occupying and in the determination of this a key factor is the number of bedrooms in the property. For a number of identified properties the Council is seeking to have them re-assessed and where appropriate they will be re-designated with the correct number of bedrooms that are in the property. There is no capital cost relating to the changes.

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However these future losses would only occur if the Council continue to adhere to the Council's rent convergence strategy. The intention is to undertake a review of the Council's current strategy and the outcome of this review will be reported back to a future Executive Board.

Q14 Councillor Robinson to the Executive Member (Resources and Corporate Functions) - Could the Executive Member confirm the cost to the Council of the EU's regulations on procurement and would he agree that a working group should be established to understand what regulations/costs could be removed?

A It is not possible to separate the costs to the council of the EU's procurement regulations from the costs of the UK's legislation and guidance on best value, and the council's own contracts procedure rules.

The EU regulations promote an approach to secure value for money, and they are being reviewed with a view, amongst other things, to reduce costs for contractors and remove barriers for small businesses.

We have recently reviewed the council's own approach to procurement through the Transforming Procurement Programme and a recommendation for a refreshed procurement policy is to be presented to April's Executive Board (next week). The refreshed approach seeks to consolidate economy, efficiency and effectiveness in all the council's procurement activity. Officers will continue to work with regional colleagues, and with the private and third sector, to improve the procurement processes that the council uses to ensure they are fit-for-purpose, cost-effective, and accessible.

Q15 Councillor J Bentley to the Executive Member (Environment) - Does the Executive Member for Environment expect the introduction of charges for residents parking permits to be a net revenue raiser for the Council and if so, how much will it raise?

A Provision for this proposal was identified in the 2013/14 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme approved by Council, which included additional net income of £400,000 pa from the proposed introduction of charges for residents parking permits. Detailed proposals are currently being developed and will be reported to Executive Board following consultation. As yet recommendations have not been prepared on the likely level of charge for permits.

The additional income will be used to cover administration costs of the scheme and be reinvested into the support of appropriate highways and transportation measures, specifically highways maintenance.

Yours sincerely

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