

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Cabinet in the Community

Meeting held 19 March 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Garry Weatherall (Chair – North Local Area Partnership)
Councillor Julie Dore (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Isobel Bowler (Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure)
Councillor Ben Curran (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources)
Councillor Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families)
Councillor Harry Harpham (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods)
Councillor Mazher Iqbal (Cabinet Member for Communities and Inclusion)
Councillor Mary Lea (Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Independent Living)
Councillor Jack Scott (Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Leigh Bramall.

1. INTRODUCTION

Councillor Garry Weatherall, Chair of the North Local Area Partnership, welcomed members of the public to the third Cabinet in the Community session. Similar sessions would take place in 6 other areas of the City. He then invited members of the public to put questions to the Cabinet Members in attendance.

2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Question 1 Barry Bellamy raised several issues in relation to the works which were taking place in the area as part of the Streets Ahead contract. He submitted a document outlining the problems which had been experienced, including those relating to dropped curbs, and concerns relating to safety. The document also set out issues relating to sheltered housing in High Green.

He requested a meeting between HiGAT (High Green Community Action Team) and Steve Robinson, the Head of Highway Maintenance. He expressed thanks to local Councillors for their help to date.

Answer 1 Councillor Jack Scott, the Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene responded and stated that he would be pleased to meet again with Mr Bellamy and other local people with the appropriate Council officers. He agreed that local Councillors

had been helpful particularly in connection with issues concerning the Streets Ahead works. The Streets Ahead works in High Green were currently at the snagging stage.

Question 2 Gill Green stated that at the last Cabinet in the Community, held in Grenoside, questions had been asked concerning the provision of litter bins and a meeting had taken place with Councillors Jack Scott and Adam Hurst. She stated that no progress had been made on the provision of additional bins and she had not yet been given a copy of the service standards, which were also requested. She understood that the highways improvement works as part of the Streets Ahead contract were a priority but asked, now that these were largely completed, whether the litter and dog bins could be made a priority.

Answer 2 In response, Councillor Jack Scott, the Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene, stated that the Council was not in a position to install additional litter bins, although he did recall that discussions were held concerning local businesses installing bins. Bins would not necessarily have to be funded by the Council. A new bin had been installed at the entrance to Burncross. The Council had to make sure that litter bins were serviced and added to the maintenance rounds. Dog waste could be put into general litter bins. The service standards were available on the Council website and he would send Gill Green the link to the webpage.

He understood that action had been taken to clean the litter hotspots, although this might not take place as regularly as people would like. He could also share data concerning the regularity of cleaning to help ascertain whether the routes which were used were correct. Data would be brought to the wider meeting concerning Streets Ahead and High Green referred to above.

Question 3 Terry Bawden stated that work had been done on Cottam Road, which resulted in the surface of the road being removed. He asked when this work was due to be completed.

He referred to the Streets Ahead contractor, Amey, having been reported to the Health and Safety Executive in relation to 100 potential breaches. He asked what the Council was doing with regard to managing safety of residents.

He also stated that a particular dog bin was situated on the wrong side of the road and had not been emptied.

Answer 3 Councillor Jack Scott, the Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene, responded that much of the road surface on Cottam Road had been planed off. However, the machine had broken down, which had caused delay. The wet

weather also meant that tarmac could not be laid onto the road surface as it needed to cool more slowly in order to form a bond.

Amey were reported to the Health and Safety Executive, although they did not necessarily agree with all of the points raised. Some of the issues raised to the Health and Safety Executive were clearly not acceptable, for instance, for safety barriers to be blown down. Councillor Scott stated that it would be useful to obtain Mr Bowden's help in connection with these issues.

Question 4 A question was asked concerning dog bins. The questioner stated that a local conservation group had purchased 2 dog waste bins and that group paid for the bins to be emptied. However, one of the bins had been removed by Amey.

Answer 4 Councillor Scott responded that he would speak with local ward councillors in relation to this issue. He also said that he believed that one of the bins in question had been stolen.

Question 5 Terry Bawden stated that he had been on a walkabout with the Health and Safety Executive and commented that it would be an advantage to also invite them to the meeting in High Green regarding Streets Ahead.

Answer 5 Councillor Scott responded that a range of issues could be discussed at that meeting. The Health and Safety Executive had produced a report concerning High Green and there were a range of advisory issues highlighted, rather than regulatory breaches.

Councillor Garry Weatherall stated that each ward has three local councillors whom local people can contact with problems or issues. People in this area could also contact Ecclesfield Parish Council.

Question 6 Dave Ogle asked why the Council do not evict families who caused persistent anti-social behaviour.

He stated that the people concerned were Council tenants and people who lived in private rented property. It was the same families and children causing damage to shops and gardens.

Mr Ogle stated that the matter had been reported and still those responsible had not been evicted. The police were aware of who the perpetrators are and there were incident reports but he said nothing is done.

Answer 6 Councillor Harry Harpham, the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, responded that the Council does evict people if they are found to be responsible for anti-social behaviour. However, this was not an easy process and it was time consuming. The Council had to build a strong legal case if it wanted to evict

someone from a Council property. If the case was not solid, then it was likely to be rejected by the courts, the anti-social behaviour would continue and the Council would have wasted a significant amount of money. A judge would make the decision as to whether, based on the evidence, someone should be evicted from a property.

Councillor Julie Dore, the Leader of the Council, commented that keeping a diary of incidents, obtaining witnesses, gathering evidence and reporting incidents was important. She also distinguished between the type of behaviour which would be a breach of a tenancy agreement and other sorts of anti-social behaviour that would not constitute such a breach. Some issues would depend upon the individual tenancy agreement.

The Council would need to know details and the concerns could also be followed up with the police and the individual landlord. A case could then begin to be compiled. She agreed that recurring anti-social behaviour was not acceptable. She said that it appeared to be a problem that people who made complaints about anti-social behaviour were not kept informed of what action was being taken as a result. If people were not satisfied, the Council should be able to explain to them why a certain outcome had been reached.

Councillor Harpham stated that he would meet with Mr Ogle to discuss the concerns he had raised. In response to a comment that, in respect of one case, the Council was not able to evict someone with mental health issues, Councillor Harpham stated that support needed to be obtained for people with mental health needs in such circumstances.

Councillor Weatherall stated that 42 families were evicted last year and he suggested that people report incidents of anti-social behaviour to the 101 telephone number.

Question 7 Eldon Hanson referred to the following question which he had submitted in writing:

Why is funding being taken away from an acknowledged area of need, Community Health, to prop up a second rate library service?

The written response was as follows:-

Funding is not being taken from 'Community Health' or other health budgets to support the library service. Although there was a proposal to use funding from the public health grant to support libraries, the Cabinet decided not to do this, and instead funding will be made available from other Council resources.

Mr Eldon stated that by second rate, he meant that anything that is

not professionally-led, tended to be of a lower level. He stated that he would rather see a smaller, strategic library service.

Answer 7

Councillor Mazher Iqbal, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Inclusion, stated that the Cabinet minute relating to the decision on Libraries was clear that resources were being found from the Council's budget and not the community health budget. He stated that he did not agree with the comments that the library service was 'second rate'.

Councillor Julie Dore stated that, if its budget had not been so significantly cut, the Council would ideally retain more professional library staff. However, with the extent of the cuts, services had to change. The Council wanted to ensure that the City had a sustainable library service and it wanted to keep the remaining libraries open, by working with communities.

The Council would continue to sustain 11 hub libraries and there would also be community libraries, run with local groups. She stated that she might expect, 30 years from now, that fewer people will use the libraries to borrow books. For example, as a result of new technologies, media such as compact disks were not borrowed from libraries as they had been in the past and libraries were selling-off such stock. New generations of people were using new technologies.

The additional funding had been allocated for 3 years to support associate libraries and, hopefully during that period, the Government would begin to see the negative impact of the cuts to local government.

Councillor Mary Lea, the Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Independent Living, stated that during the consultation on the library service, the issue of social isolation was highlighted. People's ability to visit their local library was a health issue. However, the additional funding for libraries came from Council resources, other than the health budget.

Question 8

Gill Ashbury asked a question concerning social isolation and what might be done to address it. She asked why the cut had been made to funding concessionary passes for bus services.

Answer 8

Councillor Mary Lea, the Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Independent Living, responded that the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive had cut the concessionary passes as part of their budget reductions. This change would affect older people and people with disabilities. However, people would still be able to use concessionary passes on buses after 9.30 am. These arrangements were in keeping with elsewhere in the country. The Council was giving consideration to help for children with

disabilities that might be disproportionately affected by the withdrawal of concessionary travel before 9.30am.

Councillor Julie Dore stated the bus services are privatised and the companies will only run services which were profitable. There are many routes which would not be sustainable as they were not commercially profitable. Therefore, local government funded such tendered routes and local enhancements such as concessionary passes. The dilemma was that the City Council had also been subject to budget cuts and in turn had to reduce the amount of the levy which it provided to the Passenger Transport Executive. The annual cost of continuing to provide concessionary passes, including prior to 9.30am was, in total, £300K. The alternative to making savings on concessionary travel was to cut the subsidy to unprofitable bus routes, meaning that bus services on some routes would cease altogether and resulting in people living in communities affected becoming more isolated.

With regard to social isolation, Councillor Dore referred to the City's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, one of the priorities in which was to address social isolation. It was recognised that issues such as access to library services was also a public health matter.

Question 9 Martin Haywood made reference to the Council's budget. He commented that Sheffield was one of the few places in the country that had refused to increase Council Tax. It was also one of the few places to have introduced cheap bus fares. He stated that more people of pensionable age were still driving in older age. It was important to enable people to travel so they could meet other people, but affordability was a concern for people in older age.

Answer 9 Councillor Julie Dore stated that, in 2010, the Council had £600M in government grant to spend. This had now reduced to £300M. The Council was taking often difficult decisions as to how to spend the resources that were available. For example, if funding was not taken from concessionary fares (which for buses, related to the period from 9am and 9.30am), the money spent on retaining them would need to be found from another service.

Councillor Ben Curran, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, stated that nearly three-quarters of local authorities had in fact frozen the level of Council Tax. For the City Council's part, it did not wish to add to the burden of the cost of living. He pointed out that there were 16 food banks in Sheffield and some people had to make the hard choice between eating or switching on the heating. A group on the Council had proposed an increase in Council Tax, which would require a referendum. He commented that he did not agree with that option.

Question 10 Jonathan Ogle asked a question concerning whether a

concessionary scheme would be introduced for people with disabilities.

Answer 10 Councillor Julie Dore responded that local authorities in South Yorkshire had all reduced their contributions to the South Yorkshire Passenger Authority and there would be an effect on people who once benefited from local enhancements. The effect of the change for people aged over 60 years was that they would not be able to use concessionary passes on buses before 9.30am.

However, with regards the adverse effect on young people with disabilities, the Council wanted to encourage those young people to pursue their independence, education and training. If they were to have access to education, they would need to access that education provision before 9.30am. Therefore, the Council was looking at a local scheme. This would be partly funded by the saving made by City Councillors, who had, in the budget agreed not to take the 1% increase in Members' allowances to which they would normally have been entitled (in line with Council employees' pay increase). The details of such a scheme had not yet been fully worked through. However, the Administration was committed to such a scheme as it believed that those young people should not have to pay to access education.

Councillor Jackie Drayton, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, stated that it was important to understand that it was sometimes especially difficult for families to let young people with disabilities go and travel independently. The Council also recognised that change was difficult for this group of young people in particular and wished for there to be as little noticeable change for them as feasible, so it was as easy for them as possible. It was not certain how many young people were affected and what the exact cost would be. However, the Council was working with the Passenger Transport Executive. A scheme would be introduced and she stated that she believed it was the right thing to do.

Councillor Mary Lea, the Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Independent Living, stated that there are people who cannot use public transport and 8,000 blue badges were issued to people who used private vehicles. The Council was working with care providers to help make sure that, even though people might have to travel after 9.30am, they would still have uninterrupted access to day services, for example.

Question 11 A question was asked as to whether the number of bus services in an area such as High Green could be reduced and the money invested in other service provision.

Answer 11 Councillor Jack Scott commented that some of the bus routes to

High Green were highly profitable. However, for this reason, those services were not supported to receive a subsidy. More frequent services were likely to be those which made the most money, whereas other lesser used routes may receive a subsidy. It was a commercial issue. The bus companies were private entities and the Council did not have control of these companies' operations.

Question 12 Alison Getting asked a question concerning the new swimming pool in High Green. She stated that the existing Chapeltown baths was an excellent facility and asked what will happen to the Chapeltown baths and the staff that worked there.

Question 13 Jill Ashbury asked for news on the progress of the development of a new pool.

Question 14 Mr B Bolger asked who owned and ran the Chapeltown baths and for the cost, including prices for people using the pool. He also asked what the ownership, management arrangements and costs were in relation to the new pool which was to be developed.

Answers 12-14 Councillor Isobel Bowler, the Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure, responded that the scheme for the new leisure facility involved capital investment of £7 million. Most of the finance was being contributed by the Department of Health and Sport England. One third of the capital cost was being contributed by the Council. Ecclesfield Parish Council own Chapeltown baths and were the City Council's partner in relation to the new scheme. The Parish Council will sell the existing Chapeltown baths and the capital will be reinvested into the project to develop the new leisure centre.

The work to develop the new Leisure Centre was currently the subject of a tender process (until 21 March 2014). It was expected that the leisure centre would be open by the end of 2015. It would comprise a 6 lane 25 metre swimming pool and a dedicated learner pool and there would be wrap around health facilities. The Thorncliffe Recreation Users Group was also involved and consideration was being given to the development of outdoor facilities to compliment and add value to the indoor facilities. The new facility was a replacement for the swimming pools at Chapeltown and Stocksbridge. The existing staff at Ecclesfield baths would transfer to the new Leisure Centre and this formed part of the tender requirements. The proposals were supported by Chapeltown Community Trust. The ownership of the new facility would be with the Council. The estimated annual running costs of the new facility were £100K and those for the existing Chapeltown baths were £66K. The cost to the City Council of funding both the Stocksbridge Leisure Centre and Chapeltown baths had been £436K.

One of the issues in considering the development of a new leisure

facility was the ongoing capital that would be required to keep the existing pool at Chapeltown running. This was a unique opportunity to obtain funding from the Department of Health and Sport England for facilities in the north and south of Sheffield. There was a claw back clause within the funding from Sport England. There would also be a formal agreement with Ecclesfield Parish Council including with regard to the capital contribution. The Parish Council had agreed that the existing subsidy which it paid to Ecclesfield Pool, would transfer to the new facility. There was no liability in terms of increased costs.

The Chapeltown baths would remain open until the new facility had opened. The City Council would have control over the pricing and although she could not guarantee the prices would be identical to the current prices, there would be different membership schemes. She commented that Stocksbridge Leisure Centre was, at present, a dry facility, without a swimming pool, although there was an ambition to re-open the pool.

The plan to build a new leisure facility in the north of the City was included as part of the consultation process. The proposed location of the new facility on the Thorncliffe Recreation Ground was included in the report on the Council's website.

Question 15 A question was asked concerning the carbon footprint for the new swimming pool and in relation to the Council's approach to carbon reduction.

Answer 15 Councillor Isobel Bowler stated that she had requested officers to seek the greenest options possible with regard to heating, the placement of windows and orientation of the building. The new facilities would have a considerably lower carbon footprint than the existing Chapeltown baths and these types of requirements were also included in the tender documentation and specification. Whilst, ideally, the new development would be zero carbon, the challenge of achieving this within cost limits was recognised. The aim was to seek to develop a facility with the least adverse environmental impact.

Councillor Jack Scott stated that in relation to the Council's wider approach to carbon reduction, photovoltaic cells were effective in large halls. He referred to the work of the Council in relation to the E.ON low carbon district heating network in the City.

There were 140 buildings supplied by Sheffield's district heating network. The City Council took the issue of climate change most seriously and it was something which presented a clear threat and impacted upon social justice. Climate change affected the poorest people the most, although they may do the least to contribute to it.

He referred to several initiatives to help reduce the carbon footprint of Sheffield, including the Big Sheffield Switch and the free insulation scheme (for 28,000 homes) and the launch of a new scheme. The new scheme would apply to both private sector and private rented homes and aimed to reduce heating costs.

Councillor Isobel Bowler stated that Dennis Anderson represented users on the Thorncliffe site and worked with the Council on the Thorncliffe Masterplan for the site and during the consultation relating to the swimming pool. One minor objection had been received to the location of the new facility but it was hoped that the issues relating to that objection were now resolved. The Council needed to work with the whole of the local community to get the swimming pool scheme going and to enable new outdoor facilities to be created in addition to the indoor ones. It was hoped that a hockey team could be located at the new facility through the provision of all weather pitches.

Consultation took place during January 2014 and Cabinet made a decision in February. It was appreciated that not everyone wanted the Chapeltown baths to close and that change might be difficult and the new facility may not be so convenient for some people. However, in its place there would be a high quality facility enabled by external funding.

Question 16 Natalie Yarrow asked a question concerning accessibility of the new swimming pool and facilities. She asked that consultation be carried out with disabled people and that matters of accessibility were not ignored or considered only as an afterthought.

Answer 16 Councillor Isobel Bowler stated that she was very concerned that such a development as the leisure facility should be inclusive for everyone. Accessibility was part of the brief for the scheme, so the facility could have as many people using it as possible. PACES and other organisations were part of the stakeholder group and there would also be a link to the National Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine.

Question 17 A question was asked concerning the lettings policy for a sheltered housing scheme.

Answer 17 Councillor Harry Harpham responded that there was nothing which had been brought to his attention on the issue of allocating 2 bedroom accommodation. He would look into this matter and would respond to the questioner in writing.

Councillor Julie Dore stated that, in relation to the Bedroom Tax, people over 60 years were exempt. If you were aged 55-60 years and also had a disability, you are not exempt from the Bedroom Tax.