

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Cabinet in the Community

Meeting held 20 February 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Ray Satur (MBE), (Chair - South East Local Area Partnership)
Councillor Isobel Bowler, (Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure)
Councillor Leigh Bramall, (Cabinet Member for Business, Skills and Development)
Councillor Ben Curran, (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources)
Councillor Julie Dore, (Leader of the Council)
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)

.....

1. INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Councillor Ray Satur, Chair of the South East Local Area Partnership, welcomed members of the public to the second Cabinet in the Community session. Similar sessions would be held 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 Paul Eastell asked what was being done about anti-social behaviour such as fly tipping, the use of motorbikes and dog mess at Meadow Gate Lane?

Answer 1 Councillor Harry Harpham, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, commented that the issues referred to had not been brought to his attention previously. The kind of behaviour described was unacceptable and he agreed with the questioner that a proactive approach was more effective than a reactive approach. He would visit the area concerned and meet with Mr Eastell and local residents to see what could be done.

Question 2 Richard Harvey asked if anything could be done about water drainage at the Batesquire Estate and the underpass at Eckington Way between Crystal Peaks and Sothall?

Answer 2 Councillor Jack Scott, Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene, reported that the locations concerned had not been highlighted as a flood drainage hotspot. These changed regularly. There may be a need to put in extra drains and clear gulleys and he would visit the areas to assess the issue. He would check whether the issue had been reported. Unfortunately, the Council had to react on reports as the resources were not available to monitor all spots in the City.

Question 3 Graham Sykes, a member of the Beighton Environment Group, commented that he was overwhelmed by the amount of litter in the area which had accumulated since Christmas. He participated in litter picks but this had not been resolving the problem. Previously a worker had been employed for 15 hours but this had ceased. He asked if this could be brought back to support the area?

Answer 3 Councillor Jack Scott reported that he had had 2 meetings with the local ward Councillors on this issue. He was hopeful that more litter bins would be provided in Beighton. The issue had not been reported by members of the public so additional resources had not been allocated. He commented that he was working to resolve the issue of services or organisations disputing whether it was their land to clear. 10,000 children had been spoken to about the problems with dropping litter. Councillor Scott commented that he would welcome a meeting with Mr Sykes, local Councillors and officers to look at the issue to see what could be done and whether extra enforcement officers were needed.

Mr Sykes commented that the systems in place to report such issues were very complex and this often led to frustration and a lack of desire to report. Councillor Scott commented that he would look into the issue of reporting to see what could be done to make it easier for people to report.

Question 4 Paul Eastell asked what the current situation was in respect of HS2 and how it was affecting this area and its residents?

Answer 4 The Leader of the Council, Councillor Julie Dore, commented that the HS2 scheme was supported by all the main political parties, with the exception of UKIP. It was the biggest infrastructure project this century and was necessary to rebalance the economy and build the economy in the north. Phase 1 of the programme connecting London to Birmingham was at the second reading stage of the bill in parliament. Phase 2, to connect Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield would follow shortly.

The Government had recently tasked David Higgins to see if the contract could be condensed and commence sooner and he would report back shortly. Lord Deighton had been appointed Chair of the HS2 taskforce to see how it could benefit the economy. Councillor Dore believed that HS2 was needed in the north to grow and rebalance the economy.

The issue in the Sheffield City region was that the Government's preferred station in the area was at Meadowhall whereas the City's preferred station was at Victoria in the centre. Evidence had shown that by doing that it would create an extra 6,000 jobs than if the station was at Meadowhall.

In response to a supplementary question from Mr Eastall who asked that whilst it may be beneficial for people in the future, what about those people affected by the building of the line such as in Beighton?, Councillor Dore commented that it would primarily be business people using the line and it would unlock regeneration opportunities. High value jobs were needed in Sheffield as it was currently a low wage economy. She acknowledged that there would be disturbance in the short term and the package offered to those residents affected would need to meet their needs.

Councillor Isobel Bowler, Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure added that whilst the exact route for HS2 was unconfirmed there would be uncertainty. The City Council and other local authorities would fight to make sure residents got the best deal.

Question 5 Steve Edmonds asked if the Council got their way and the station was stationed at Victoria would the route not therefore be closer to the centre of Beighton and Woodhouse and affect more residents in the area?

Answer 5 Councillor Julie Dore responded that in any situation such as this residents would be affected. However, the Council was representing the whole City and needed to think long term. Youth unemployment was vast in the City and she wanted a future where young people had access to jobs.

Norman Sellers added that it was important to monitor closely the Government's actions as, in light of recent events, money may be diverted from HS2 to flood defences. The infrastructure had been run down for a number of years and additional money will be taken from infrastructure to pay for HS2. The timescales for the project many people couldn't get their heads round and it was creating a lot of uncertainty.

Councillor Julie Dore responded that she recognised this and David Higgins had been commissioned to get it started sooner. She was determined that the line would come to Sheffield. At the same time the Council were working on cross-peninne routes. If the money invested in HS2 meant other infrastructure was neglected then the growth hoped for would not take place.

Question 6 Tracy Higgingbotham referred to a recent judgement which had reallocated funding to Sheffield following a challenge by the Council to the allocation of Government funding. Therefore, would this funding be made available to support keeping libraries open across the City?

Answer 6 Councillor Mazher Iqbal, Cabinet Member for Communities and Inclusion, reported that the Sheffield City Region and Liverpool City Council had challenged the distribution of European funding as it was felt that the allocations were unfair. The challenge had been successful but crucially the ruling simply stated that the judgement was unfair and not that the funding would necessarily be reallocated.

Councillor Iqbal added that the reason for the Libraries Review was the drastic cuts which the Council had faced.

Councillor Leigh Bramall commented that the funding referred to was European Regional Development Funding which had a strict criteria of what the funding could be spent on and would not be available to be spent on libraries. The challenge to the funding allocation was a good example of the Council and partners working together to stand up for Sheffield.

Tracy Higginbotham commented that it was about perception and asked whether the fourth largest City decimating its library service sent out the right message?

Councillor Mazher Iqbal reported that the Libraries Review had started in July 2011. Two consultations had taken place, one in the summer of 2012 and the recent consultation between September 2013 and January 2014. Over four years £180m had been cut from the Council's budget. A recent announcement from the Chancellor had stated that the Council needed to find a further £80m savings. When the budget had reduced by 50% therefore, it was not possible for services to stay the same. 1200 Council staff had left the Council in that time and with the budget agreed at the Cabinet meeting held on 19 February 2014 a further 600 jobs would be lost.

The Council had worked to try and keep libraries open by

'salami slicing' hours and not filling vacancies but it was clear that the service could not continue as it was. The Council had to adhere to the legal requirement to provide a comprehensive and efficient service. Where groups had come forward to make proposals to run the libraries the Council wanted to work with them to keep the service as well resourced as possible.

Question 7 Michelle Wood questioned the level of assessment for special needs children in infants and junior schools as early detection rates seemed to be low which had an obvious knock on effect for the future?

Answer 7 Councillor Jackie Drayton, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, thanked Ms Wood for her question and said she was sorry to hear she had to wait a long time for her son to be diagnosed. She agreed that the earlier a child could be diagnosed the easier it was to put systems in place to support them and their families and that the Council also recognised that too. The Council had an Advocacy and Support Service to support parents as well as a Parent Support Group.

The understanding of Aspergers had advanced considerably in the last ten years. The Council was trying as hard as they could to ensure diagnosis took place in the early years stage. In terms of statistics she believed there did not seem to be a higher or lower trend of SEN children not being detected.

Question 8 Graham Sykes asked if there were any proposals to introduce 20mph schemes or traffic calming measures in the local area?

Answer 8 Councillor Leigh Bramall replied that the Streets Ahead project would encompass the whole City. An assessment of work required took place six months before arriving in the area. This wasn't conducted earlier due to resources. Introducing speed humps on a road was difficult as support for their introduction was always split.

Question 9 Richard Pearson asked two questions. Firstly, he asked will the reviewing of the green belt in drawing up the Local Plan mean that the burden of new housing was spread more evenly across the City as the South East had had to bear more than its fair share in the past?

Mr Pearson's second questions asked whether there was a substantive programme to 'green up' the urban brownfield sites that developers were reluctant to use and if so what was it?

Answer 9 Councillor Leigh Bramall reported that the review of the green

belt was likely to add a small amount of sites where there was potential for development. The Council did try and spread the sites out across the City and build on brownfield sites where possible. People were less willing to invest in building on brownfield sites.

In response to a comment from Mr Pearson that brownfield sites needed improving to attract developers, Councillor Harry Harpham commented that under previous Housing Market Renewal funding, the Council used to receive £22m per year on average. Under the current New Homes Bonus the Council received around £20m over six years.

The Council was trying to use the New Homes Bonus in different ways to try and attract developers. 10,000 permissions were currently in place across the City. With the current housing market struggling, developers were 'banking' land and waiting for the market to pick up so that they could make more of a profit.

Question 10 David Bradford asked what was happening in relation to the widening of Ochre Dike Lane and whether parking could be allowed on the field side away from residents?

Answer 10 Councillor Leigh Bramall reported that a scheme had been consulted on widely and the process had been completed. The outcome of the consultation was a 50/50 split. He believed, on balance, that the widening of the road was a better option. The overall scheme was part of a wider scheme to make bus services more efficient.

Question 11 Roger Marsh referred to residential development which the Council was proposing to carry out on three green sites in Owlthorpe. He therefore asked whether it was the intention of the Council to complete the linking of the two sections of Moorthorpe Way as part of the development or whether they were happy to see Owlthorpe as a divided township?

Answer 11 Councillor Isobel Bowler responded that consultation would be held prior to the application being submitted and recommended that Mr Marsh attend one of the consultation events to make representations.

Question 12 Michael Spurr, a member of the Chesterfield Canal Trust, commented that funding was being affected now as a result of HS2 as the Canal Trust had had a grant removed as the area affected would be decimated by the HS2 line.

Answer 12 Councillor Julie Dore acknowledged that the proposals affected a lot of people in different ways. She would talk to

John Burrows at North East Derbyshire Council as to the grant referred to. She was fighting for an early decision from the Government as she recognised that the uncertainty was affecting a number of people.

Question 13 Don Elks commented that voluntary groups were beginning to wonder whether there was any reason to continue when they weren't being supported by the Council and would any extra support be available?

Answer 13 Councillor Harry Harpham commented that the Council certainly wanted voluntary groups to continue their work as lots of things would not happen in the City without them. He understood the sense of dejection, however, which groups were feeling.

Councillor Mazher Iqbal added that the Council did provide a small resource to support voluntary groups and local Councillors had a ward pot available. A recent decision had been taken to review the way the grant was distributed.

Question 14 Richard Harvey commented that he was tired of people parking on pavements and blocking access to disabled users and others and asked whether anything could be done about this situation?

Answer 14 Councillor Leigh Bramall reported if the vehicle was parking on a double yellow line then the Council could enforce. If there was no line but the vehicle didn't allow sufficient room for a pram or wheelchair this could be seen as blocking the highway and a ticket could be issued by the Police. The Council had no power to enforce where there wasn't a line.

Question 15 Tracy Nicholson asked what the plans were to mitigate against the effects on the most vulnerable members of the community from the closure of the libraries?

Answer 15 Councillor Mazher Iqbal reported that every time a service was reviewed or a policy was introduced an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was required to be carried out. For the libraries which had been identified as at risk each one had had a group submit a business plan to run the library and these had been accepted by the Council. An extra financial package had been offered to those libraries to support them. A long term lease had been offered at peppercorn rent and investment would be made in the catalogue system.

Councillor Julie Dore added that you could not take 50% out of the budget without impacting on service provision. In 2010 the Discretionary Budget granted to the Council was £600m.

This was used to provide libraries, trusts and museums, community activity, parks and green spaces, ensured highways were clean, safe and tidy, provided community safety, emptied the bins, looked after the elderly and vulnerable groups, supported early years and youth activity, employment and skills, regulatory services and provided funding to enable the economy to grow. 50% of that funding had now gone. The voluntary sector was now involved in providing all services with the exception of waste collection. All services were impacted and it was difficult to maintain Sheffield as a place to live, work and enjoy. None of the services had been wiped out but there had been a need to reduce parts of the service. The Council were doing whatever they could to protect what we had in Sheffield.

Councillor Ray Satur then concluded the meeting and thanked members of the public for their attendance and questions and Cabinet Members for their responses.