

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Cabinet in the Community

Meeting held 11 February 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Isobel Bowler, Leigh Bramall, Ben Curran, Julie Dore, Harry Harpham, Mazher Iqbal, Steve Jones and Mary Lea and Steve Jones

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1. INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Councillor Steve Jones, Chair of the South Local Area Partnership, welcomed members of the public to the meeting and introduced the Cabinet Members present who gave a brief overview of their areas of responsibility.

2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Q1a Matt Goodwin commented on the lack of a grit bin on Bankwood Road which was the main access route to Bankwood School. He emphasised that with the number of people going up and down the road, it needed to be gritted to make it safe. He also referred to the Council's review in Spring of gritting in the City and asked that his request be considered.

Q1b A member of the public speaking on behalf of Clive Redfern suggested that advertising be placed on grit bins as a way of raising income.

(A number of other suggestions were made by Clive Redfern in his written submission by way of a public/private partnership arrangement)

A1a & b Councillor Julie Dore stated that all ideas regarding public/private partnership arrangements for grit bins would be considered as part of the Council's full review of winter maintenance in the Spring. In referring to Bankwood Road she explained that the road was designated within the secondary gritting network, so it would be gritted and ploughed in the event of snow.

Councillor Julie Dore informed the meeting that there was generous provision of grit bins across the city, with just under 2000 available, which was twice the number provided by some other authorities

Reference was made to the 50% reduction in discretionary spend available to the Council following Central Government budget reductions since 2010. This had required the Council to make reductions in all its services with the exception of safeguarding children. It was emphasised though that, whilst highways had not

received the highest percentage of cuts and that gritting was important and critical, it could not be safeguarded.

Q2 Phil Shaddock enquired into the timescale for the new Woodseats Library and if provision had been made for the relocation of Woodseats Advice Centre that was based in the library?

A2 Councillor Mazher Iqbal informed the meeting that the Central Government grant cuts placed on the Council since 2010, had resulted in cuts in services, including the library service and repairs to associated buildings. Fortunately, in respect of Woodseats Library, the Woodseats Medical Practice had approached the Council to work in partnership to provide a new practice on the site of the library. The new building would also incorporate a new library and pharmacy. Subject to planning permission being granted at the end of March, the new building would take approximately 12/15 months to be built. In the meantime, the Council had extended the operating hours of Highfields and Ecclesall libraries and would be providing a home library service for people who were housebound. Books could also be ordered and dropped off from Woodseats Medical Practice. It was also indicated that the little library service would continue providing activities for young children.

It was explained the Council were working closely with Woodseats Citizens Advice Bureau to find an alternative premises.

Councillor Mazher Iqbal, in referring to the cuts to the library service budgets, paid tribute to communities who assist with the running of the library services in their areas.

Q3 Phil Shaddock raised a further question over the conduct of Councillors in full Council meetings and how it was perceived by the public attending the meetings. In particular, he referred to an inappropriate response given by a Cabinet Member to a Councillor from the Green Party.

A3 Councillor Julie Dore acknowledged the issue raised in relation to the conduct of Councillors in the full Council meeting which appears to be similar to conduct seen at Prime Minister's Question Time. She emphasised the importance of the meeting in making important decisions for the City, but also in allowing the public to attend to present petitions and ask questions of the Cabinet Members. Councillor Dore said that she was unaware of the alleged incident raised by Phil Shaddock, but would remind Councillors of the need for good conduct in the Council Chamber, as she recognised that poor conduct was not appreciated by the public attending the meetings. The importance of engaging with the public was stressed though and that, whilst the public could attend the full Council meetings, the Cabinet in the Community

was a good way to engage with residents in their area. Councillor Dore asked that if people had any other suggestions to engage with the community she would be prepared to consider them.

Q4 Pat Wagner raised concern over 2 betting shops being allowed to open in the Newfield Shopping centre, rather than food shops.

A4 Councillor Leigh Bramall explained the Council had little control over planning law introduced by Central Government, which governed planning control across the country, whether a city or small town. With regard to betting shops, as they were classed as financial services, the Government removed the requirement for them to apply for planning permission for a change of use, when wanting to open up in premises previously used for retail, bars and restaurant purposes. This was a temporary relaxation of the rules to assist with the economy and reinvigorating the High Street. He stated that he had been part of a campaign to lobby the Government to give local government the planning powers to control the opening of betting shops by making them a separate use class. Councillor Bramall stated that the Government had consulted on changing the planning law six months ago, but nothing had since been introduced with regard to this matter. He further stated that there was a strong case for large areas of planning control to be given to the Local Planning Authority so that decisions can be made in accordance with the needs of a community. At present, if a planning application is refused against planning law, there is an opportunity for the applicants to appeal the decision and for costs to be awarded against the Council.

Q5 Michael Moyne asked a question over dog fouling of pavements in the area.

A5 Councillor Julie Dore acknowledged that, like litter, this was a difficult matter to resolve. She said that the Council would consider putting up signs and placing an article in the local newsletter to educate people on why their dogs should not be allowed to foul the pavement.

Councillor Harry Harpham informed the meeting that over the next few months the Council would be rolling out, through the Housing Service, a new initiative called Housing Plus, which would see more Housing officers on estates. This would give more opportunity for irresponsible dog owners to be approached over the fouling of public areas. Also, the Council was investigating introducing a unified uniform, for example, housing officers and wardens, city centre ambassadors and traffic wardens and that, with appropriate powers, they would all have the power to fine people who were breaking laws in the other services' jurisdiction, rather than just one service/agency being able to fine people in respect of their own area of authority.

The following questions were asked by Mr Mitchell:

- Q6a Why couldn't he have swing doors for his Council rented garage rather than the lift up and over garage door he had at present which was far too heavy for him to lift?
- Q6b What was the procedure for the swilling of waste on stairwells undertaken by the contract cleaners?
- Q6c Why don't the Council's grass cutters cut the grass around edges as they used to rather than, instead, leaving long grass?
- A6a Councillor Harry Harpham informed the meeting that in accordance with the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, the Council will be looking at all garage sites across the city over the next two months. Investment will be made in garage sites where there is a demand for them and those that are not being used will be demolished.
- A6b Councillor Harry Harpham stated that he would contact Mr Mitchell over this matter and would also contact Housing Officers to raise the issue with them and, if necessary, seek to ensure the cleaning contract is enforced in respect of the specification for clearing up waste.
- A6c Councillor Harry Harpham informed the meeting that rather than grass cutting being carried out by Housing and Parks and Open Spaces, the two services had been combined to provide a consistent service across the city. In respect of the concern raised by Mr Mitchell, the matter would be raised with officers to ensure the grass cutting being undertaken was meeting the required standards.
- Q7a Mr King asked who was responsible for the supervision of the Amey contract for street works? Concerns were raised over the positioning of fences around holes dug out for street lights and the need to abide by the Road Traffic Regulation Act Section 8.
- A7a Councillor Julie Dore confirmed that the Council was the client and responsible for commissioning and paying Amey to deliver the management of the city's highways and that they would be improving the standard of street lights, pavements, trees and roads over 7 years. They were also responsible for providing maintenance of the aforementioned areas for 25 years. The work being undertaken is monitored by the client/commercial team within the Council who are responsible for ensuring the contract is delivered in accordance with the specification. Unfortunately, the Council is unable to monitor all minor and repair works being undertaken and that the public should report if there are problems,

so they can be investigated and, if necessary, require Amey to address the matter.

Q7b Mr King asked that enforcement be undertaken where legal regulations were not adhered to, such as the failure to place sand bags to prevent barriers from being blown over leaving holes exposed on pavements, reinstatement of white lines and in respect of traffic lights not working?

A7b Councillor Julie Dore stated that if the Council was made aware of any such problems, it would undertake enforcement and where Amey was found not adhering to the contract, penalties could be issued.

Q7c What is the economic cost to the city in view of the lack of grit bins to keep traffic flowing, particularly with the hilly terrain the city has compared to other cities?

A7c Councillor Julie Dore advised that the Council was involved with many areas such as culture, museums and arts, leisure, events, education, early years and jobs and training where the economy benefits, although the benefit didn't necessarily come back to the Council. Unfortunately, gritting wasn't a service that could be protected as it wasn't possible to ascertain benefit to the economy.

Q8a Kahtus Leach asked how the initiative by the Friends of Meersbrook Hall, to purchase the building once it was vacated by Parks and Countryside Services, could be supported by the Council. The future use of the building in terms of providing facilities for the community, which he indicated was supported by local Ward Councillors, was outlined.

A8a Councillor Ben Curran explained that the Council had introduced a corporate workplace programme which involve moving staff into fewer and more concentrated office buildings which would provide £30 million in savings. It was explained that Meersbrook Hall was one of the buildings being considered for withdrawing its staff from, although no decision had been made in respect of this matter.

With regard to supporting the Friends of Meersbrook Hall, if the building was vacated, he indicated that he would work with local Councillors and the Friends' group, however, there was a need to have a wider appreciation of the requirements for the community as a whole. This would involve a process of engagement with all stakeholders and determine what is in the interests of the whole community.

Q8b Kahtus Leach asked further why this process had to be undertaken. He pointed out that the Friends group was a large umbrella organisation supporting the community and that they

were seeking expert advice on taking on a large difficult building that could be of a considerable value to the city and its communities.

- A8b Councillor Mazher Iqbal explained that the Council did support local organisations and referred to the work being undertaken by them in libraries. But in respect of Meersbrook Hall there was a need to consult widely with stakeholders and the local community. This was to ensure the finite money that was available had the maximum impact to ensure the longevity of a local project. He reminded the meeting that grant funding was becoming more competitive, with less resources available to support community organisations.
- Q8c Kahtus Leach asked that Council officers be provided to give expertise and support in planning bids for grants. He stated that he understood the Council's financial position and wanted to set up a financial operation that was robust and would not require continued support from the Council. He stated that his group had already been consulting in the community, with 150 people attending a public meeting it had held and had 300 people on its mailing list.
- A8c The Chair (Councillor Steve Jones) reassured Kahtus Leach that the Council would work with the Friends group to get the best result for the community.
- Q9 Jennifer Alison asked for assistance over rubbish at her maisonette. She referred to a dry store for bulk waste being closed last year and that residents could only recycle paper and card. In addition, it was explained that a request to reinstate refuse bins for each resident had been turned down and that residents from the Bankwood estate left their rubbish under the maisonette stairwells where she lived. It was further stated that rubbish shoots in the maisonette get blocked every day with rubbish being left on the landing and that a recycle bin had been filled with industrial waste.
- A9 Councillor Harry Harpham stated that he would contact Jennifer Alison over the issues she had mentioned, once he had been in touch with Housing officers. He explained that it was the responsibility of people who reside in the maisonette to have regard to their neighbours by not leaving rubbish on landings and that rubbish should not be dropped off at the maisonette from another area. He also stated that he would ask for the recycle bin issue to be looked into. The matters raised were, in some cases, tenancy management issues and that, with the initiative of Housing Plus putting more officers on to the estate, these issues would be looked at to see how they could be prevented. He referred to the phasing out of rubbish shoots, but that would be expensive and

that not every resident was in favour of walking up and downstairs to deposit their rubbish.

Q10 A written question put forward by Mrs Wood was read out on her behalf as she had left the meeting. Her question asked why not all Council Tax was collected?

A10 Councillor Ben Curran informed the meeting that £31 million had not been collected in Council Tax which represented 1% of the total amount owed to the Council. He said that when broken down per head of population, the city's performance was average when compared against local authorities and that the city performed better than most core cities. Over the last year, the Council had issued 56,000 Summons, 39,000 Liability Orders, 11,500 Attachment Orders, 9,000 cases had been referred to bailiffs and Charging Orders had been placed on people's houses. Councillor Curran advised that the Council was not liberal in writing-off Council Tax debt compared to other authorities, with an individual's debt left on file for future reference.

Councillor Mazher Iqbal referred to the Council Tax support being removed for people who previously had been entitled to it and informed the meeting if people had problems in paying their Council Tax, if they contacted the Council about the matter, arrangements could be put in place to assist them.

Martin Brighton asked the following questions:

Q11a Does the Council agree that:
(i) prejudice and sanction shall not be imposed upon any group unless supported by evidence? and
(ii) due process shall be both followed and demonstrable?

Q11b Should it be shown that the Council's answers to public questions are inaccurate, incomplete, or even deliberately untrue, can there be any objections to equal publicity being given the truth?

Q11c When given the choice between the will of the people and the Council wishes, the Council replied that the will of the people shall prevail. Does this Council still adhere to this policy?

Q11d Two abused vulnerable women, from among several, would like to know why the Leader feels the need to change the original offer to meet and listen so as to have support from the presence of an uninvited male Councillor.

A11a Councillor Julie Dore in response stated that with regard to prejudice, sanctions and evidence, it would depend on the circumstances of the particular situation and that she would need to know what the prejudice and sanctions were that were being

imposed and on who. There must be evidence or a process of gathering further evidence into the matter to impose a sanction on someone.

A11b Councillor Julie Dore informed the meeting that the Cabinet Members could only answer questions at Council meetings on the known information at the time, so that if more detail was required, that would be followed up after the meeting. She further stated that, the Council aimed to give the correct information, but if answers to questions were found to be inaccurate this would be investigated to prevent it happening on future occasions,

A11c With regard to the will of the people, Councillor Julie Dore explained that people expected more services, such as additional grit bins, but the Council couldn't be expected to fulfil the will of all the people, as there were insufficient resources. Ultimately, following consultation, it would depend on what were the priorities of the people and what the Council could reasonably deliver.

A11d Councillor Julie Dore explained that when asked to meet the group of people, she was not aware of any conditions and that it was a reasonable expectation for a portfolio Member to also attend the meeting in view of their responsibilities in the area mentioned. In view of the women's request to meet with her alone, once the purpose of the meeting was known, she would consider a further meeting with them.

Martin Brighton withdrew a further question as the Cabinet Member was not available to provide a response.