

Council – 9th November 2016

AGENDA ITEM 13 – QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

1. Question from Councillor Elizabeth Scott to Councillor Darren Clifford

In what ways since the commitment was confirmed by Council in March 2015 has the City Council honoured the Armed Forces Community Covenant to which the Council originally committed itself in 2013?

Councillor Clifford replied:

Regarding the Covenant, some of the things the Council does or has done since it was put in place in January 2014 are:

- Gives priority banding on the housing register to access social housing for ex-servicemen and women for up to five years from leaving the services
- Fully disregarding war widow pensions for benefit purposes
- Co-ordinating the WW 1 Memorial Group
- On February 27, 2015 the ship's company of HMS Lancaster held a static parade outside Lancaster Town Hall at which formal re-dedication of the Freedom of the City Scroll took place and the company were inspected by The Mayor of Lancaster, Councillor Susie Charles.
- Organising and funding the Remembrance Day service in the Gardens of Remembrance at Lancaster Town Hall every November and sending representation to the services in Morecambe and Carnforth.

2. Question from Councillor Elizabeth Scott to Councillor Darren Clifford

*In the light of the motion approved by Council on the 13/04/2011 and reaffirmed in March last year – that Lancaster City Council resolves to give “its fullest possible support” to events held to mark the UK Armed forces Day – please identify the support the Council is providing for Armed Forces Day 2017 **and by way of a supplementary question is the City Council taking ownership of Armed Forces Day celebrations.***

Councillor Clifford replied:

“It is not the place of the City Council to take ownership as it is a national event to celebrate the services.

The role of the Veterans' Champion was established to support and champion the plight of services leavers within our District. Councillor Scott was appointed to and has remained in that role since it was first created and acts as a valued liaison between ex-servicemen and women and the Council to make the most of the facilities and support that has been offered within existing budgets.

Other things the Council does in relation to Armed Forces Day are:

- Works with the Armed Forces Steering Group, via the Veteran's Champion, providing administrative support and a room with Lancaster Town Hall or the Storey for up to four meetings per year (on a cost neutral basis, provided the building is already in use).
- Working other partners (Lancashire Constabulary and Fire and Rescue, etc) to provide advice to the event organisers via Event Safety Advisory Group (ESAG)
- We provide advice and information on marketing, providing press and PR support for Armed Forces Day events in both Lancaster and Morecambe. The latter includes design work, distribution and digital marketing.
- Report 'charities' we are sceptical of to the Charity Commissions. We as a Council take responsibility to ex-forces seriously and pay tribute to them. We will use the full power of the law against those who scam our citizens."

3. Question from Councillor Roger Mace to Councillor Brendan Hughes

Under a headline "Dump charges have increased fly-tipping, councils admit", The Times reported on 20 October that "In May, councils gained the power to issue fixed penalty notices of £150 to £400 for fly tipping, but many councils have not issued any."

What use has been made of this power in order to deter fly tipping in this District?

Cllr Hughes replied:

In order to offer a fixed penalty notice we still have to have exactly the same level of evidence as a prosecution. We are considering as a Council the most appropriate ways to deter fly tipping including CCTV. We have 3 prosecutions for fly tipping pending (2 significant fly tipping incidents from domestic sources and 1 from a commercial source).

Supplementary: *Can you provide a written answer to say how the Council proposes to discourage any fly tipping that might coincide with the introduction of green waste charges?*

Cllr Hughes confirmed that he would provide a written answer.

4. Question from Councillor Roger Mace to Councillor James Leyshon

What progress has been made concerning the implementation of Cabinet's decision of 29 March 2016 about the future of St. Leonards House? The original decision was confirmed (following a call-in) at the Cabinet meeting on 26 April 2016, as is recorded in cabinet minute 97.

Councillor Leyshon replied:

An update on progress has just been reported to the November meetings of Cabinet and Budget and Performance Panel. Clearly some aspects remain commercially sensitive but I can share the following information publicly.

Firstly the Council entered into the exclusivity agreement, to facilitate the developer undertaking additional surveys as part of their due diligence. This was to ensure that structurally, the building could be converted into student accommodation and that sufficient warranty could be provided on the existing structure following the construction works. Whilst the additional survey results revealed some further structural issues, the additional information has given the developer some comfort that their scheme remains financially viable.

Given that outcome, the Council has now entered the next stage of the process, in that the conditional purchase contract was exchanged with Robertsons in August. Under this, in essence the transfer of the building is conditional primarily upon planning and listed building consent being gained, allowing for the associated Judicial Review Period to expire.

Subject to the transfer of the building being completed, the contract then requires construction work to be undertaken.

5. Question from Councillor Caroline Jackson to Councillor Brendan Hughes

Following on from the O&S Late Night Economy Task Group which highlighted the importance of CCTV. Could we know what discussions have taken place or are intending to take place regarding the maintenance and replacement of the current system?

Councillor Hughes replied:

I look forward to seeing the report from the Late Night Economy Task Group.

A working group consisting of the City Council, Chamber of Commerce, Lancaster BID, Morecambe BID and Lancashire Constabulary has been set up to develop a fully costed business case and plan for a 'repurposed' CCTV system that would be technologically up to date, cheaper to run, more flexible, generate income and be able to help tackle other problems like fly tipping. We've been asked by Blackpool Council, Fylde and Wyre to see if there is a way to work together to reduce costs. Important to note that the Council wont be funding it totally.

Supplementary: Are we giving some funding then?

Councillor Hughes replied:

If CCTV is brought back in a different form it would be silly to expect everyone else to fund it. It will be fed into the budget.

6. Question from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Brendan Hughes

Is the portfolio-holder for community safety willing to engage the CSP in addressing the lack of lighting along the canal towpath between Shaw St. bridge and the paths to Mardale Rd. and Riverview Close?

Councillor Hughes replied:

I will request officers to ask the Police for information on the number and nature of incident reports the police have had in this location. If it is established that there is a safety problem then it may be appropriate for this to be referred through to the partners of the CSP to look at what the most appropriate solution would be and then make recommendations to the relevant landowners including offering to work with them on how something like this could be implemented.

Unfortunately the CSP does not directly have any funds available that would cover the costs of a lighting scheme and nor does it have the remit for delivery and maintenance of lighting schemes.

7. Question from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox to Councillor James Leyshon

Can the portfolio-holder for corporate property share with me the current number of desk spaces in Morecambe town hall and the current and achievable desk space capacity in Palatine Hall, Lancaster town hall and Citylab?

Councillor Leyshon replied:

As a general indication, MTH can support around 120 desk spaces and Palatine Hall can support around 160. This isn't the whole picture though, as clearly MTH has space for other facilities such as meeting rooms and the Council Chamber. The need for them, and all other ancillary spaces, also needs to be taken into account. There's also the need to undertake major works in the basement of Lancaster Town Hall, meaning that many staff will need a temporary home for a few months and these sort of shorter-term issues also need to be considered when assessing the Council's accommodation needs over any period.

Regarding Citylab, the property is treated as a commercial property primarily for external lettings and in view of that, and of the capacity of Palatine Hall, Citylab's desk space capacity isn't considered really relevant.

Overall, what's important is that the use of all council buildings is reviewed strategically, and arrangements are in hand for scrutiny involvement in that process, well ahead of any actual decision-making.

Supplementary: Context is Annex 9 (General Fund Budget future savings options). Rationalisation of office space has been discussed for a number of years and services to people should be ahead of property. Isn't there a need to take action urgently in rationalising office space?

Councillor Leyshon said he would look at Annex 9 – He praised the staff in Property Services and said they would be looking into capacity, to ensure there are resources available to take the matter forward.