

## **AGENDA ITEM 15 – QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL**

***NB: Questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 were answered at the meeting. The other answers were provided after the meeting as written responses.***

### **1. Question from Councillor Jon Barry to Councillor Darren Clifford**

*Given that the City Council did not manage to install charging points for electric vehicles in its car parks during 2016/17, can the cabinet member give me a timetable for when the work will be done in 2017/18?*

#### **ANSWER**

The County Council is working on a project to install charging points to on street parking locations. In order to avoid replication of effort and benefit from economies of scale, we piggy backed onto this project for our off street car parks. Due to some technical issues with procurement, County advised that we could no longer proceed in this way but once they had secured a preferred supplier we would be able to purchase charging points from their framework contract, which would still be beneficial.

The delay has actually been useful because in this area technology is moving very rapidly. Officers recently received advice from an expert in this field. Car manufacturers will shortly be producing electric cars with batteries that have a range of 350+ miles. This means that, on the one hand, sales of electric cars are likely to increase but on the other hand, people will be less reliant on an extensive infrastructure of charging points- as they will be able to get there and back to home for most journeys. Experience from other Cities and towns has also shown the fitting of one or two charging points in off street car parks merely means that just one car takes up the space for a protracted period- often beyond the amount of time it takes to charge the vehicle.

Work is currently taking place to establish what the best way forward will be for the City Council, and we are looking at other options. A particular focus will be on providing a charging infrastructure for our own fleet so that we can shift over to some electric vehicles in the future. We expect that in the first half of 2017 /18 we will install charging points at White Lund Depot and on the car park where our pool cars park behind Palatine Hall. We will also be looking at what the possible options for multi car charging points on off street car parks are and, given the improvements in battery technology, what the likely future demand will be.

### **2. Question from Councillor Roger Mace to Councillor Anne Whitehead**

*The Local Plan now out for consultation is anticipating (in round figures) between 13000 and 14000 new homes this district between now and 2031. Some of these new homes will be built during the period from now until 2020.*

*How is the financial impact on the Council from these new homes brought into account in the budgeted figures being presented to Council this year for "council tax receipts" and the "New Homes Bonus" in the period 2017/18 to 2020/21?*

## **ANSWER**

Currently the Council's tax base projections assume annual net growth of 600 Band D properties per year, drawing on recent experience. Officers from Finance, Revenues and Planning services liaised to inform those estimates. The tax base is monitored during the course of the year, and forecasts will continue to be reviewed and updated as necessary as part of the annual budget process. As the Local Plan progresses, and as more information becomes available on the likely timescales for new housing developments being completed, then that information will be factored into subsequent tax base reviews. At this stage, we cannot be any more precise.

In terms of New Homes Bonus (NHB), for 2017/18 the budgeted grant income is based on actual council tax base information to around October last year. For future years projections, as reported to Cabinet in January, these are based on figures (in £ terms) provided by Government through the settlement, but at present we cannot yet tell what housing growth assumptions sit behind them. As Government is changing the NHB scheme, unfortunately there is no better basis on which to forecast at this time, but the position will be kept under review as part of our financial monitoring and budgeting arrangements.

It is important too not to forget the service and therefore cost pressures that also come with housing growth. Again, as far as possible these are monitored to ensure budgets are adequate but it is not an exact science. Such pressures are kept under review and at some stage, budgets will inevitably need to be updated.

### **3. Question from Councillor Roger Mace to Councillor Eileen Blamire**

*Hansard on 25 January 2017 quotes the Prime Minister as saying "how sad it is that Labour councils are not willing to put forward proposals to increase the prosperity and economic growth in their areas"*

*Without making reference to actions that have already failed or are already in progress, what new positive action is our Council Leader proposing to put forward for our District in the next four months to demonstrate that the Prime Minister may be mistaken in her view of Labour Councils?*

## **ANSWER**

The first and most significant action was to make the bold decision in the face of severe Government spending restraints to continue to operate an economic development and regeneration function in the 2015 and 2016 budget rounds. Both these non-statutory functions were options for service withdrawal yet the Cabinet supported them continuing and were not prepared to consign the council's economic development activities to become a thing of the past.

In the forthcoming budget round I propose to create a reserve to enhance our decision to keep economic development by enabling the council to invest in a return to proactively promoting the district targeting inward investment and skills.

**4. Question from Councillor Charlie Edwards to Councillor Anne Whitehead**

*Since the Government announced that Councils will keep all business rates back in 2015, does the Council know what proportion it will receive of this fund, and what proportion will go to other organisations (Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Authority and Lancashire Police & Crime Commissioner).*

**ANSWER**

No the Council does not yet know (and every other authority is in the same position).

Although Government announced its headline intentions regarding 100% business rates retention some time ago, it still has much work to do to develop how the scheme will actually work, and it is not yet clear in which year the changes will be implemented. Government aims to introduce full business rates retention within this parliament, but that could mean implementation in 2019/20 or 2020/21 – or it could slip. Much more progress needs to be made before councils can make informed estimates of what the financial impact will be.

In the meantime, the Council has responded to Government consultation on business rates retention and it will continue to monitor developments and factor them into its financial forecasting and planning. More Government consultations are expected over the next couple of years. The Local Government Association also has an important role in helping to shape future proposals, for what is a very complex subject, and the Council contributes through such forums as far as it can.

**5. Question from Councillor Charlie Edwards to Councillor Janice Hanson**

*What efforts by the Council have been made to bid for central government funding for economic development in the District?*

**ANSWER**

The list is extensive over the years. There has been a continuous process of bidding for and accessing external funding despite the downsizing of the Council's Economic Development activities in 2010. Examples of projects progressed with external funding are the Chatsworth Gardens housing regeneration, the Square Routes public realm schemes in Lancaster and Morecambe, and both the Light up Lancaster and Vintage by the Sea festivals which now have national recognition.

**6. Question from Councillor Caroline Jackson to Councillor Karen Leytham**

*Funeral poverty has been in the news recently. Increasing numbers of people are encountering large debts or inability to pay for funeral costs. Could the cabinet member give us the numbers and % rise in public health (Council provided) funerals 2014-15 and 2015-16 and the cost to the council each year.*

**Councillor Leytham replied:**

The council has a duty under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act to coordinate the burials of people who die without the financial means for their own burial (and where no family member can be found to take on this responsibility). We do this at minimum cost, with sound and efficient arrangements in place, whilst at the same time doing everything we can to limit this impact on the council's finances. Although the numbers are relatively low there is evidence of a rising trend. Recent figures are as follows:

- In 2014/15, 9 public burials at a total cost of £ 9,393.92 (no monies could be recouped from the affairs of the deceased so that was the net cost).
- In 2015/16, 14 public burials at a total cost of £13,935 (a small amount has been recovered already and to date the net cost was £12,839 - however another £2,000 in cost recovery is anticipated once several property sales are completed).
- ( For further information, in the year 2016/17 to date 15 public burials have been arranged at a total cost of £16,003. A further one is pending. Work is ongoing to recover funds where possible for example by tracing deceased people's bank accounts.)

It is not straightforward to calculate percentage increases in number of cases but the three-year average has risen from 25 to 35 and now (including this year to date) 39 public burial cases running over three consecutive years. Officers periodically put public burial provision out to competitive tender in order to minimise the cost. The Public Funeral contract is due for renewal on 1st April 2017 and an increase in the charges per funeral is anticipated.

**Councillor Caroline Jackson raised a supplementary question:**

*Are there any plans to counter the situation?*

Councillor Leytham replied that it was difficult as the council was obliged to provide funerals. This was going out to tender shortly and the costs were expected to rise.

**7. Question from Councillor Caroline Jackson to Councillor Karen Leytham**

*We have had a number of complaints by residents of dog on dog attacks which have caused injury to a dog and high vet bills. In each case the attacking dog was in a public place and not on a lead. Could you tell us what is being done to reinforce the message that dogs must be on leads and kept under control?*

**ANSWER**

Whilst there can be some cross-over with the Police, in the Lancaster district dog-on-person attacks are investigated by the Police, whilst dog-on-dog attacks are investigated by the council. This is something we take very seriously. Over the last four years the council's Dog Warden Service has received and investigated on average 88 complaints a year regarding dog attacks. It's not always the case that

dogs are off leads – in some cases the dogs were on leads at the time of attack and in a couple of cases were they were even at the other side of a gate.

With this in mind, the council went to great efforts when introducing a Dog Control Order in 2012 requiring dogs to be on leads in a range of places including public highways, car parks and a range of public amenity areas. In addition we also have a Dog Control Order which authorises us to require a dog to be put on a lead in other locations. Contraventions of these legal requirements may lead to issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice or prosecution in the Magistrates Court.

Failure to properly control a dog can be really anti-social. Within the last 12 months council officers have started to use powers under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014 to deal with dogs which are allowed to roam and behave aggressively. Community Protection Warning letters are issued, and non-compliance leads to further action – ultimately prosecution.

Action can also be taken under the Dogs Act 1871 by applying to the courts for an order requiring that a dog be kept under control. The magistrates can specify any control measures and usually include that a dog be kept on a short lead and muzzled in all public places.

The Dog Warden Service also carries out a range of awareness-raising and educational activities such as school visits and work with the Dogs Trust to promote responsible dog ownership.

#### **8. Question from Councillor Andrew Gardiner to Councillor Eileen Blamire**

*As a council all we hear is how wonderful the combined authority will be. However as a council we have not had a full debate with looking at alternative options, when will the full council have the option to debate and vote on this or alternative options?*

#### **Councillor Blamire replied:**

A briefing note will be issued to inform all members of the key information and decisions to be made relating to the Lancashire Combined Authority. It is planned that an update report will be submitted to Budget Council on 1 March on forming a Combined Authority. (The Combined Authority is currently meeting in shadow form.)

Lancaster City Council's options at this initial stage of the Combined Authority's formation are simply

- to become a constituent member of the Combined Authority, with further decisions to be made as the authority progresses, or
- not to become a constituent member

Councillor Blamire urged Members to attend a briefing about the Combined Authority to be held on February 16<sup>th</sup> at 6.30pm at Lancaster Town Hall.

**Councillor Gardiner raised a supplementary question:**

*How much does it cost to be part of the Combined Authority at the present time and how much will it cost over the next 12 months?*

Councillor Blamire replied that there had been no costs. All the work was done voluntarily, mainly by Preston City Council. When the Combined Authority was formed it was anticipated that each authority would contribute a small amount but the actual figure was uncertain, up to £10K.

**9. Question from Councillor Andrew Gardiner to Councillor Eileen Blamire**

*If one of the councils in Lancashire votes against the idea of a Mayor would this end the idea of a combined authority and affect the funding for the area?*

**Councillor Blamire replied:**

The Parliamentary Order to form a Combined Authority at this first stage will not include any commitment to an elected Mayor. The Combined Authority is not dependent on a Mayor. Any Council opposed to an elected Mayor would not therefore affect the formation of the Combined Authority.

Any further progress on devolution negotiations with the Government will be brought to future Council meetings. All Councils will be given the opportunity to debate a devolution proposition at their Council meeting when this has been negotiated with the Government. No devolution deal will be committed to by the Combined Authority without the full consent of all constituent Councils.

**Councillor Gardiner raised a supplementary question:**

*If we vote against a mayor do we lose funding?*

The Chief Executive replied that following the formation of a Combined Authority there would be another debate. In terms of full devolution which is fiscal devolution, a Mayor would be required. A Mayoral Combined Authority requires a further order (another decision). We were not there yet. A decision to enter into a Combined Authority would first come to Council.

**10. Question from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Anne Whitehead**

*Quoting from the relevant minute from last full council:*

*'Supplementary: Can Cllr Whitehead contact Preston City Council to talk about the advantages of what they've done?*

*Councillor Whitehead replied that she would look into this.'*

*Can Cllr Whitehead report back on what she has learned of Preston City Council's work on community wealth building?*

## **ANSWER**

I haven't contacted Preston City Council yet, as I'm waiting until we get into discussing procurement as part of the strategic review. Options then include discussing with Preston what they do and/or inviting Matt Brown to give a presentation (he gave a public presentation in Lancaster in December).

### **11. Question from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Hanson**

*Can you provide a progress report on negotiations with British Land and Lancaster University concerning the development of Canal Corridor North?*

## **ANSWER**

The Council and the university are in the final stages of completing their due diligence processes to evaluate the British Land proposals both in terms of procurement, state aid, risk and value for money. The Council has taken advice from experienced legal and commercial specialists and officers are in the process of digesting advice only recently finalised before preparing to brief Council. It is hoped that briefings can be arranged in spring.