



Coventry City Council

Council Meeting

29 June 2009

Answers to questions contained
in Booklet 3

1.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor Maton

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Foster

TEXT OF QUESTION:

'What did Councillor Foster understand David Frost [Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce] and Michael Portillo to mean when, at a recent Coventry and Warks Chamber event, they said that the only way to protect Health and Education services under a Tory Government would be by making large scale cuts in 'welfare' budgets?'

Answer:

I would like to thank Cllr Maton for this question and I am glad he has raised the speech given by David Frost in particular, given the criticism of the Government's economic policies that it contained.

My understanding of their speeches was that they both recognised the priority the next Conservative Government will give to health and education. As they are both aware a clear commitment has been given by the Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, that there will be a real terms increase in NHS spending each year and that we will move to protect key frontline services by reviewing wasted expenditure on items such as the National Identity card scheme.

In relation to the Social Security Budget (welfare) it is clear that continued failure by the Government to react effectively to the current economic crisis will see increased spending on out of work benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), etc. The recent news around further increases in Coventry's Unemployment and the delays in agreeing a package of support for Jaguar Landrover all show how the Government's reaction has so far been lacking. It was last year that calls were made by myself for a £50bn National Loan Guarantee scheme to inject liquidity back into Coventry businesses and to help them weather the worst of the credit crunch, whilst protecting jobs. Sadly the government's own scheme was announced much later and has been slow to give the support needed with complicated criteria to be met by those in need of urgent help.

It is this failure of policy that will see welfare bills continue to rise and unless measures, such as giving employers incentives to get job seekers back to work and changing the rules to allow JSA claimants to immediately undertake training, the increased cost will put pressure on other key budgets like Health and Education.

In looking beyond the likely date for the next General Election the figures included in the recent budget presented by Alistair Darling show the true extent of the Governments plans for major spending cuts. The budget included proposals to cut all departmental spending by 7% each year for three years starting in 2011 and also indicated that Government investment will fall from

£44bn in 2009-10 to just £22bn in 2013-14. This does raise serious questions

about whether the Government is privately planning to make cuts to funding for, or severely delay, key projects in Coventry that are scheduled to commence after the next Election.

The clearest message that came out of the meeting Cllr Maton refers to is that many businesses want a clear plan for recovery over the next five years, not just a plan to help the current Government survive for another 10 months. That is why so many supported the call by the Chamber's President in his opening address for an immediate General Election, one that I am only too happy to endorse and I hope Cllr Maton will join me in doing so.

2. **QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor Windsor**

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Foster

TEXT OF QUESTION:

Would the Cabinet Member acknowledge the concern that section 106 monies from the Highfield Road site have been wrongly allocated for works that should have been funded by the Highways budget when they were meant to benefit the local St Michael's Ward Community to develop a Community Facility. Would the Cabinet Member make available to Council the original planning consents for housing on the Highfield Road site and also ensure that representative bodies from local communities have the final say on allocation of section 106 monies from ward areas in future as opposed to council officers?

Answer:

I would be more than happy to make available to Councillor Windsor the original planning consents and Section 106 agreements for the Highfield Road site, although given the size of the paperwork I have not attached it to this response.

Planning permission and Section 106 agreement for the redevelopment of the Highfield Road site was concluded in 1999. Within the overall details of the 106 agreement specific mention was made of financial support for a community building. The Section 106 required that the developer construct or provide a site for such a building and a contribution of up to £100,000. In addition the Section 106 also made it clear that prior to the submission of reserved matters (arising from the planning approval) the Council could determine to take a sum of £130,000 from the developer in lieu of the community building contribution.

Since 1999 there has been many ideas and discussions about provision of additional community facilities in the Hillfields area – but none of these have come to a conclusion about how the Highfield Road contribution could be applied.

In 2004 the developer was submitting the reserved matters application and since no decision had been made about where that Section 106 money should be applied, then Council officers accepted the £130,000 financial contribution in lieu of the community facilities.

From the outset it had always been understood that a £100,000 building plus

land or £130,000 cash would be unlikely to deliver a new community facility of any size or significance. The Section 106 money was anticipated to contribute towards a bigger project which, as outlined above, was not forthcoming.

The Council received the money in 2006 and with interest it has now risen to £168,000.

Between 1999 and 2009 no work or proposition to use this money had come forward. In the close down of the 2008/9 City Council accounts the Officers WAN Programme Board received an updated report on the overall financing of the Primelines/UTMC/WAN project and it was decided to apply the Section 106 monies from the Highfield Road development to support such costs as the impact upon the Hillfields area. This is due to the danger of money being returned if not spent, although does not preclude a scheme coming forward.

In the limited area where there is discretion for in terms of how the Section 106 money should be applied, I would be happy that in future any application of such monies beyond £100,000 be decided by the relevant Cabinet Member to ensure that such monies are applied in the most effective way for the area and the Council as a whole. This will of course give ward councillors the chance to input in the process.

3. **QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor Windsor**

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Noonan

TEXT OF QUESTION:

Can the Cabinet Member Explain why traders in Hay Lane, a site ideal for cafe type development are being charged admittedly £300 per annum and , via evidence from traders £700 per annum for putting out chairs and tables and display boards for advertising. Would the Cabinet member either waive all charges or apply a nominal fee in recognition of the fact that we are in a recession and a formerly lively street next to this chamber is facing boarded up properties and ruin whilst grandiose city centre regeneration plans are being discussed?

Answer:

Background Information:

Pavement cafés make a positive contribution to the street scene, adding atmosphere and enhancing the feel of the city. Subject to site conditions, agreeing the design and the consideration of any objections, pavement cafés may be sited on the public highway and are authorised by the granting of a Highways Amenities Licence by the City Council under Section 115 of the Highways Act 1980. The charge for a new licence is £300 which covers the Council's legal and administration costs in processing the application. No additional charges apply.

The Highways Amenity Licence is required in addition to an appropriate Premises Licence relating to the main licensed premises, where applicable. The operator will be required to hold public liability insurance to the value of £5million and indemnify the Council against any relevant claims and other

liabilities. Failure to hold a valid Licence would constitute an offence.

Any changes to the operations, including replacement furniture and operating times, must be notified to the City Council, which would require the Licence to be amended. There is currently no charge for this service.

Response:

Traders along Hay Lane that apply for a Highways Amenity Licence are charged £300 as a one-off fee to cover Council costs as part of their application. No other fees are currently levied beyond the initial granting of the licence. The suggestion that traders are being charged between £300 and £700 per annum is incorrect.

The one-off fee of £300 merely covers the Council's costs in processing Licence applications. Within this context, the figure is considered reasonable. To waive the Licence fee altogether would result in a shortfall in the budget of Legal Services and Highway Services. Furthermore, waiving the fee for traders on Hay Lane would create an inequitable situation in terms of Licences that are issued for businesses elsewhere in the City.

4.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor O'Boyle

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Noonan

TEXT OF QUESTION:

'Now that the belated work on Ironmonger Row has started after 15 months of delay, dally and damage to the city economy, could the cabinet member please inform me when the council report is to be published informing us all of the new plan for the much down sized and downgraded renovation of the area?

ANSWER:

The Chief Executive is currently preparing a report for presentation to Cabinet on 28th July 2009.

5.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor Harvard

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Noonan

TEXT OF QUESTION:

'How many people have attended or visited Canley Crematorium in the last 5 years?

Answer:

There is no formal record kept of the number of people who attend the Crematorium or Gardens of Remembrance. However, I can confirm that the number of funerals that have taken place between 2004 and 2008 was:

2004 - 2710
2005 - 2732
2006 - 2612
2007 - 2550
2008 - 2582

At the time of the Best Value Review of Bereavement Services in 2000, it was estimated that c 100,000 mourners a year attended funerals at Canley Crematorium.

6. **QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor Windsor**

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Ridley

TEXT OF QUESTION:

Would the Cabinet Member explain the possible future for Land secured for a development that has not happened near St Patrick's Road following ongoing concerns by residents and Bed and Breakfast proprietors?

Answer:

The development which is located at the joining of St Patrick's Road and Friars Road has an approved planning application, submitted by Parkridge, for up to 168 apartments and 144 car park spaces within an underground car park. The planning application expires December 2009. The Council's planning and property sections have had no contact with the developer for over 12 months. Parkridge who originally intended to complete the development, put the development site up for sale over 8 months ago. In this current depressed property market it is unlikely (especially with the cost associated with an underground car park) that the development will occur in the short term, although progress with the adjacent Friargate development could assist to promote the scheme.

Officers are trying to contact Parkridge to request that they tidy up the site.

7. **QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor Windsor**

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Ridley

TEXT OF QUESTION:

Would the Cabinet Member acknowledge the concerns of residents near Lady Herbert's Gardens regarding people causing nuisance and pro-actively work with local members, residents and agencies including CVOne to help protect local people who choose to live and contribute to life in the city centre?

Answer:

I am now aware that a petition was delivered to CV One raised by residents of Chantry Place, within Lady Herbert's Garden relating to recent instances of

vandalism, anti-social behaviour, etc. Councillor O'Boyle also made CV One aware of this petition.

CV One has met with the organiser of the petition, has information via their own staff and sub-contractors of such behaviour and have spoken to the Police. The resident of Chantry Place did confirm that the Police had responded to specific instances and that CV One staff/English Landscape staff were regularly visible in the area.

In recent weeks vandalism has been caused by a group of circa 100 youths in the garden on a Saturday.

I am happy to agree that – with our partners – we will work together and do what we can to protect this special place in the City Centre.

8. **QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor Windsor**

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor Clifford

TEXT OF QUESTION:

OF QUESTION

Does the Chair of Scrutiny Board 4 not share my concern that having sold itself as a healthcare facility in a so-called "Under Doctored " area,

The private healthcare provider running the new health facility in Stoke Aldermoor is actively marketing itself in areas of St Michaels Ward and Lower Stoke Ward in Areas already well provided for in terms of GP surgeries both in terms of GP practices in St Georges Road and Binley Road?

Answer:

My concerns as Chair of Scrutiny Board 4 are focused on the poor levels of health experienced by many residents in the parts of the City referred to in this question.

The Stoke Aldermoor area has significant levels of health deprivation and existing services have failed to make a significant impact on this situation. Stoke Aldermoor is amongst the 10% most deprived communities in the UK and the case for NHS Coventry to commission additional primary care provision in this area was overwhelming.

Members will be aware that all GP practices are private contractors operating within the NHS, and each has significant autonomy in the nature and shape of services offered. It is a matter of some disappointment that in areas with such significant demands for healthcare services some existing have providers reported surplus capacity and that this has been the case for several years. Additionally low levels of uptake in Primary Care services is a contributory factor to over-utilisation of Accident & Emergency Services, a problem of increasing importance in Coventry.

For all communities, especially those noted in this question, there is a need to proactively seek out and encourage patients to actively engage in lifestyle

management, screening and health promotion activities. One of Scrutiny Board 4's roles is to ensure that this work becomes a fundamental part of primary care in these areas, and that a depth of proactivity is established which is sustainable for the long term.

One of the most serious problems many people in the City report is accessing primary care. Many GPs are open for restricted periods and for people who work or have caring commitments this can be problematic. The new GP practice in Stoke Aldermoor will be open from 8am to 6.30pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday and 8am to 8pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Additionally it will also open on Saturdays from 8am -12noon. The practice area boundary has been drawn widely to provide improved access and choice to a wider section of the Coventry population (I have provided Cllr Windsor electronically with a map of the practice area).

The issue of choice is of course an important one, no patients will be required to move to the new practices; if patients are happy with their current GP then they are free to remain with them.

Whilst the new practices in themselves are only a first step in improving access to health care, the test that I and hopefully Scrutiny Board 4 will seek to apply is whether or not the new facility can demonstrate a positive impact on the health outcomes for the City's patients. I welcome the report that the new surgery in Stoke Aldermoor is actively marketing itself for new patients. One of the tests of the success of the practice will be a reduction in the number of people not registered with a GP. Other things I will be expecting include increased levels of vaccination and immunisation and a general increase in the various preventative interventions GPs can be so successful in making.