

COUNCIL – 23 JANUARY 2014

QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. Question submitted by Councillor Shaw to the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services and Performance (Councillor Tweed)

“For each of the 4 years 2010/11 to 2013/14 would the Cabinet Member please supply details of:

- (i) the total number of properties which have been granted mandatory 80% Charitable Rate Relief
- (ii) the amount of Charitable Rate Relief granted.

In relation to 2013/14, please supply the information for the full year on the assumption that current occupancies remain unchanged until the year end.”

Response:

“Officers will send this Information to Councillor Shaw.”

2. Question submitted by Councillor Shaw to the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services and Performance (Councillor Tweed)

- 1 “Over the 4 years April 2010 to March 2014 how much mandatory 80% charitable rate relief has been granted (or is expected to be granted) by Sefton Council to the Healthy Planet Foundation in respect of its “Books for Free” charity shops within the Borough?
- 2 Where have these shops been located?
- 3 In respect of each of the premises currently occupied by Healthy Planet/“Books for Free”, what is the rateable value and total floor area as determined by the Valuation Office Agency?
- 4 Is the Cabinet Member aware that Healthy Planet produced a brochure entitled: “Instant Rates Saver: 50% on Empty Units”, which explains how their Scheme works? In particular, is he aware of the “worked example” given within the brochure which describes a scenario where:
 - (i) A landlord is liable for full rates of £55,000 on an empty shop.
 - (ii) Instead, under the Scheme, the landlord would donate up to £27,500 to Healthy Planet who would then “occupy” the shop.

- (iii) As a charity, Healthy Planet would be entitled to 80% charitable rate relief and only pay £11,000 in rates.
- 5 How would the Cabinet Member characterise a Scheme which, in the “worked example” described above has the following result:
- (i) The landlord is £27,500 up on the deal as the donation is only half the full rates bill.
 - (ii) Healthy Planet is up to £16,500 up on the deal, as it receives a donation of £27,500 but only has to pay the reduced rates charge of £11,000.
 - (iii) The only loser is the local council which has lost £44,000 in rate income.
- 6 Will the Cabinet Member ensure that a thorough investigation is undertaken to ensure that any charitable rate relief granted to Healthy Planet is legitimate.”

Response:

- 1-3 “Officers will send this information to Councillor Shaw.”
- 4 “Yes”
- 5 “I categorise this scheme as one that is worthy of investigation.”
- 6 “An investigation is already underway. Can I also thank Councillor Shaw for his input into this matter.”

3. Question submitted by Councillor Shaw to the Cabinet Member – Communities and Environment (Councillor Hardy)

- “1. Will the Cabinet Member advise me approximately what percentage of the Borough’s households experienced delays in the first full week of the new year in relation to:
 - (i) recycling/green box/food waste collection
 - (ii) residual/grey wheelie bin collection?
- 2. What lessons have been learnt to ensure an improved service in January 2015?”

Response:

1. (i) "Due to both high volumes of materials and high winds the external contractor fell behind in most areas. The entire recycling service was back to normal with collections by Tuesday, 14th January 2014. Appropriate default notices have been issued to the contractor."

(ii) "None."

Collections were managed in line with the published Christmas collection schedule."

2. "Despite the cuts in available funding to the Local Authority, Sefton will see an improved and enhanced refuse service in 2014 with the launch of plastic and cardboard recyclables whilst maintaining a garden waste recycling service. Discussions for Christmas 2014 planning have commenced and every effort is being made to mitigate the effects of the Tory and Lib Dem savage cuts to Sefton MBC and the effects these are having on cleansing resources."

4. Question submitted by Councillor Robertson to the Cabinet Member – Communities and Environment (Councillor Hardy)

"Clause 4 of Sefton's Parish Charter states that "In their role as democratically accountable bodies, parish and town councils offer a means of reshaping the decisions that affect their communities. They offer a means of decentralising the provision of services and of revitalising local communities."

"Is the Cabinet Member satisfied that this clause of the Parish Charter has been complied with, having regard to the way the Borough Council has treated Aintree Village Parish Council in relation to the recent application to operate a community/volunteer run library service in Aintree?"

Response:

"I am not aware that Aintree Parish Council have applied to operate a Library service."

5. Question submitted by Councillor Robertson to the Cabinet Member – Communities and Environment (Councillor Hardy)

"The Parish Charter, available on Sefton Council's website, clearly states that the Borough Council aims for 'Fairness between council tax bills in parished and non-parished areas.'

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that this fairness principle is still a strong guiding principle for the Borough Council?"

Response:

“This Council is committed to treating all the people of Sefton fairly unlike the government that Cllr. Robertson supports who are treating the people of Sefton not just unfairly but with contempt as far as local government finance for services is concerned.”

6. Question submitted by Councillor Welsh to the Cabinet Member – Communities and Environment (Councillor Hardy)

“I understand that Tesco declined to clear away wind-blown waste from their car park recycling site near the Kew roundabout, which had covered the roundabout and surrounding areas after the Christmas period. Sefton Council's cleansing department cleared this mess on Sunday 19th January, having to cone-off the roundabout to do so.

How much did this clear up cost? Does this mean that, due to Tesco refusing to take responsibility for clearing this mess from and around the public highway that Sefton Council be required to repeat this sort of clear-up again should it happen in the future - or will council officers commence negotiations with Tesco to seek their improved monitoring and emptying of their recycling site?”

Response:

“Rubbish blowing from the recycling site located on the nearby Tesco car park did contribute to the overall issue at Kew roundabout following the recent high winds. Tesco were not approached directly and therefore did not refuse to clear away the waste.

In relation to the cost of the clear up operation, there are no specific or identifiable costs associated with this exercise as the operation was undertaken by the Cleansing Sections 'Night Operations' crew.

Yes, we are commencing discussions with Tesco.”

7. Question submitted by Councillor Hands to the Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Tourism (Councillor Maher)

“Would the Cabinet Member support the move to give the local authority the power to introduce a local levy of up to 8.5% of the rate on large supermarkets or large retail outlets in their area with an annual rateable value of not less than £500,000?”

Would the Cabinet Member also support the revenue from this levy being retained by the local authority in order to improve local communities in their area by promoting local economic activity, local services and facilities, social and community wellbeing and environmental protection, by using the Sustainable Communities Act as agreed by the memorandum of understanding between the Local Government Association and Government?"

Response:

"The Council Leader has already responded to the LGA in a positive fashion and we await the outcome from Government. Any additional income generated would be more than welcome to help offset the many and escalating £millions that have been and continue to be unfairly removed from Sefton's local communities by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Government."

8. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Tourism (Councillor Maher)

"In recent years, the Tourism Information Centre in Southport was in a most prominent site at the main road junction in the town which visitors could hardly miss noticing. Could measures not be taken to ensure that visitors in the central area are made more aware of the Tourist Information facility within the Atkinson Centre which is now hidden away at the back of the building and does not even have a window onto Lord Street to advertise its existence?"

Response:

"Councillor Dawson will be aware that in recent years the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Government has unfairly taken many millions of £££'s from Sefton Council's budget. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Council to both balance its books and provide sufficient funding for the Council's required statutory duties, Council's local and Borough-wide priorities and the aspirations of all of our communities."

"Notwithstanding the above, the design of new signage in the form of two totems that display in the dark has been approved by Planning and is on order. As these are bespoke items that are built to order there is a lead in period of around 6 - 8 weeks and we are targeting the end of February for installation. The new totem signage contains information about the TIC. The existing system of finger posts does point people towards The Atkinson."

9. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Children, Schools, Families and Leisure (Councillor Moncur)

“What was the cost of the internal re-arrangement which saw the information facility moved from the North West corner of the Atkinson Centre to the back of the building and from which budget was this cost met? When was the decision taken to make this re-arrangement and by who?”

Response:

“The cost of the works was £27,500 and was met from the budget identified in the Capital works for the 1st Floor Gallery shop and other savings on fit out. The decision was taken by Officers in August on operational grounds to move the Gallery Shop from the 1st floor to the ground floor with all of the other daily retail/transactional business areas such as the bakery and box office. With the Atkinson’s challenging income targets it is important that every aspect of income generation is maximised. This change effectively saves money on staff and maximises the retail offer.”

10. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Transportation (Councillor Fairclough)

- “1. How many applications in how many streets in (a) Southport (b) Sefton have there been for residents’ parking schemes to be introduced in the period since there has been a ‘moratorium on the introduction of new schemes’?”
2. What is the present cost of existing residents’ permits and how does this relate to the actual cost of operating existing Residents’ parking schemes?”

Response:

1. “a) 18
b) 71
2. £20.00 to part cover administration”

11. Question submitted by Councillor Preece to the Cabinet Member – Communities and Environment (Councillor Hardy)

- i) “Could the Cabinet Member explain why the Council is not permitting a voluntary organisation which has previously done much good works in the Woodvale woodlands to continue their good work?”

- ii) When the Council is in receipt of serious allegations concerning the operation of a voluntary organisation which is both in receipt of public financial support and operating within Council-owned facilities, how does the Council investigate such disputes to inform it as to who it should be dealing with in the future?"

Response:

- i) "This is not my area of responsibility."
- ii) "An appropriate investigation will be undertaken."