

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 21ST JANUARY, 2021

A MEETING of the COUNCIL was held as a MICROSOFT TEAMS VIRTUAL MEETING on THURSDAY, 21ST JANUARY, 2021, at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Paul Wray
Vice-Chair - Councillor Andrea Robinson
Mayor - Ros Jones
Deputy Mayor - Councillor Glyn Jones

Councillors Nick Allen, Duncan Anderson, Lani-Mae Ball, Nigel Ball, Iris Beech, Joe Blackham, Nigel Cannings, Bev Chapman, Phil Cole, John Cooke, Mick Cooper, Jane Cox, Steve Cox, Linda Curran, Susan Durant, Neil Gethin, Sean Gibbons, John Gilliver, Martin Greenhalgh, Pat Haith, Rachel Hodson, Charlie Hogarth, David Hughes, Eva Hughes, Richard A Jones, Kenneth Keegan, Majid Khan, Jane Kidd, Nikki McDonald, Tosh McDonald, Chris McGuinness, Sue McGuinness, Bill Mordue, John Mounsey, David Nevett, Jane Nightingale, Ian Pearson, Andy Pickering, Cynthia Ransome, Dave Shaw, Derek Smith, Frank Tyas, Austen White, Sue Wilkinson and Jonathan Wood.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rachael Blake, Nuala Fennelly, John Healy, Mark Houlbrook, Tina Reid and Kevin Rodgers.

26 Minute's Silence for the recent deaths of former Councillors Peter Farrell, John Mills and Ray Mullis

Prior to the commencement of formal business, Elected Members, Officers and members of the public, observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect and remembrance in relation to the recent deaths of former Councillors Peter Farrell, John Mills and Ray Mullis, who had recently passed away.

27 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

28 Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 19th November, 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council Meeting held on Thursday, 19th November, 2020, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

29 To receive any announcements from the Chair of Council, the Mayor, Members of the Cabinet or the Head of Paid Service

The Mayor of Doncaster, Ros Jones, made the following announcements:-

“I would first like to provide an update on the flooding situation.

Members are aware that we proactively declared a major incident for potential flooding. We have seen a significant amount of rainfall and flood alerts are still in place. It is an ongoing situation which we are monitoring closely. Services have worked 24/7 to support local people and I would like to thank staff, communities and partners for their tremendous effort to put the robust plans in place, and for being there for our residents and businesses.

Over the past year, Doncaster’s resilience has been tested to breaking point. Whilst residents and businesses were recovering from the devastating impact of the 2019 floods, the Covid-19 pandemic created an unprecedented health and economic crisis. We have persevered and delivered for our communities as part of an incredible Team Doncaster effort to save lives, provide care and stop the virus spreading.

We have worked with partners to get financial support out to those whose businesses and livelihoods have been affected, whilst continuing to deliver housing, major projects and essential services for the people of Doncaster. The response to the pandemic continues at pace, and we are supporting NHS colleagues to vaccinate priority groups, and to test for the virus.

We are continuing, where possible, to provide Council services and protect our most vulnerable residents, while working in a safe environment. We need to continue to be innovative and agile in our response.

Responding to and recovering from the pandemic, will be our priority in 2021. We have great cause for optimism with the roll out of vaccinations, but we are at a critical stage with the pandemic, and hospital admissions are still rising.

We have responded throughout the crisis to help people, communities, businesses and organisations, to get through the Covid emergency. For example, we have:-

- Supported 1,000s of residents struggling to pay their Council Tax;
- Made quicker payments to small businesses;
- Boosted funding for voluntary groups to help residents;
- Increased Ward budgets;
- Opened a Community Hub as a one-stop shop for advice and support, and provided 1,000s of food parcels;
- Opened up Town Centres and got services back up and running when we could over the summer;
- Developed a jobs and skills programme with partners; and
- Secured £7m from the Government for capital projects.

I will shortly be announcing a further plan for the next 3 months. The ‘Spring Sprint Plan’ will respond to the additional, acute impact of the pandemic on people and businesses. It will build on the support already in place and include actions to:-

- Ramp up the support for the most vulnerable residents in our communities; and
- Support businesses and help residents get back to work.

At the same time, a clearer sense of hope for the future will come into view. Council approved a Motion to declare on the climate change and biodiversity crisis.

We now have the final report of the Doncaster Climate and Biodiversity Commission, and this has informed the Environment & Sustainability Strategy which the Council will consider today, which will be the basis of our emerging Borough Strategy.

Both major milestones in our drive to tackle this profound and pressing challenge, and this year, we will step up Doncaster's response to it. For the first time, we can tackle head on the need to balance the wellbeing of people with the wellbeing of the planet. We cannot have one without the other.

As well as a greener Borough, we need to consider how to develop a more resilient, prosperous and inclusive place.

The pandemic has worsened inequalities in society, for example for vulnerable people with underlying health conditions. All our efforts need to be underpinned by a relentless approach to equalities.

The floods and pandemic have highlighted the best of Doncaster. We have seen community spirit and compassion in abundance.

I am determined that this is a lasting legacy and supports one central mission; Thriving People, Places and Planet.”

The Chief Executive, Damian Allen, made the following announcement:-

“With the pandemic and flood alerts, we are in response mode on many fronts.

The Director of Public Health's Annual Report is part of today's agenda and I am sure it will provide a powerful insight into the magnitude of Covid's impact and the local response to it.

The multi-agency response to the flood alerts is ongoing. Despite these major challenges, we have continued to deliver new homes and major projects, supporting jobs, leisure, culture and learning. The Danum Gallery, Library and Museum, a new cinema and restaurants, and a University Technical College, are all due to open in 2021. The new Railway Station forecourt creates an impressive gateway into the Town.

Urban centre master planning is inspiring bold new ideas for prime sites like the Waterfront and the Junction 5 link to Stainforth and Unity has been completed.

We have ensured our key services have continued to be delivered, but as the Mayor has stated, we need to also look ahead. Our ambitions for the Borough and how we deliver them, must respond to a number of seismic challenges. Pandemics and flooding are currently at the forefront of our mind, both of which can be connected to the climate change and biodiversity crisis; a planetary emergency.

The Mayor has made it clear that the path to net zero by 2040 is now central to our policy ambitions. The next decade is crucial to achieve an 85% reduction in emissions. We have major opportunities to achieve significant Borough-wide change by building on the successes of the Doncaster Growing Together Plan, and the improved partnership working which has been so crucial to the effectiveness of Team Doncaster's response to the pandemic.

We have the opportunity to:-

- Develop a more regenerative Borough that renews and improves its assets and strengths, and as part of this, develop a circular economy that keeps finite resources in a loop of use and reuse; and
- Create new green jobs and businesses.

New technologies, inequalities and ageing populations also demand new ideas, new approaches and the ability to seize new opportunities. It has never been more clear that Doncaster is a 'place of places' in an interconnected world.

A new Borough Strategy to replace the DGT Plan will provide the opportunity to develop new wellbeing goals for the Borough to balance the wellbeing of people with the wellbeing of the planet, as the Mayor has emphasised.

The Council's Corporate Plan will be considered by Council on the 1st March, 2021 which will start the transition to a new Borough Strategy.

It is essential that on the ground, delivery is policy led and evidence based. The Housing Strategy which has just been agreed, provides a clear focus for ensuring residents have access to good housing as the basis for their health and wellbeing.

A new Education and Skills Strategy will bring together priorities for lifelong learning and developing tailored, flexible pathways to employment.

We will also be developing a new Culture Strategy and undertaking a Tree Policy review, which are all part of the rich and diverse policy landscape which needs to guide day-to-day delivery.

The Corporate Plan will be presented alongside the budget.

Throughout the pandemic, we have incurred additional costs and lost income. The Government continues to provide short-term funding and the future financial position remains uncertain. Despite this, a three year balanced budget will be presented to Council in March, which will set out how we will maintain investment in the Borough's priorities and continue to protect vulnerable residents.

We must continue to sharpen our focus on communities which means responding to the distinctive needs, aspirations and character of our communities as reflected in the 'Doncaster Talks' feedback. We need to work closer with communities and build on local assets and strengths.

Our ongoing response to the pandemic and the risk of flooding are acute reminders of why this matters.

I would like to thank staff, partners and residents, for their response and resilience in the face of this latest Borough challenge.”

30 Questions from the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13

(A) Question from Mr. C. J. Nowak to Councillor Chris McGuinness, Cabinet Member for Communities, Voluntary Sector and the Environment:-

“On March 17th last year, Councillor Glyn Jones told me:-

‘The Council remains committed to ensuring that the people of Doncaster are not unduly impacted by the actions of an anti-social few.’

However, this commitment has not been enough. As I predicted at the Council meeting I attended 12 months ago, I am asking the same question.

Why is fly-tipping of household waste still happening on a regular basis in the alleyways behind houses in Hexthorpe and other areas?

It seems the Council is happy to clean up the mess, but not take positive action to stop it.”

Councillor Chris McGuinness gave the following response:-

“Doncaster Council does not, and never has, permitted or condoned fly-tipping. Fly-tipping is a national issue and something that blights both rural and urban areas of Doncaster. As an Authority, we have taken a range of steps to provide advice and guidance to residents in affected areas, on the correct/legal means of waste disposal, especially so in areas such as Hexthorpe where we have had a more transient population. However, there continues to be instances of fly-tipping throughout the Borough and some of this is linked to organised crime. We continue to work with partner agencies and South Yorkshire Police to address such activities.

From an enforcement perspective, we have and continue to use a range of approaches and powers; these include:-

- Inspection of fly-tipped waste to identify the source(s);
- Installation of CCTV, overt and covert, to identify those responsible;
- Officers undertaking regular inspections of known hotspots, Borough-wide, to identify issues and problems;
- Ongoing engagement with landlords and residents about legal means of waste disposal as part of the Selective Licensing Scheme and general advice/guidance;
- Additional funding through the Safer Streets Programme has been secured to install additional CCTV, improved street lighting and alley gates, to prevent anti-social behaviour, including fly-tipping; and

- Multi-agency operations to tackle fly-tipping; waste carrier permit enforcement.

The 2020 Enforcement figures, Borough-wide are:-

- 8 successful prosecutions completed and 21 waiting to be heard;
- 73 Fixed Penalty Notices issued; and
- 2 vans used for fly-tipping/illegally carrying waste seized and one recently crushed.

We continue to prosecute those responsible. However, due to Covid restrictions, there is a significant back-log in Court hearings and our formal action processes, with approximately 50 people awaiting interviews under caution for fly-tipping offences, and 21 prosecutions waiting to be heard. There is no time limit on the length of time before action can be taken, should there be delays, so if anyone has been interviewed and has since heard nothing, I can assure you, they will.

I would like to remind residents of the duty of care placed on residents. This means if they pay an unlicensed carrier to take away their waste and it is fly-tipped, and it can be traced back to them, they can also be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice. As a result, some Fixed Penalties have been issued to residents.

In addition to the above, Borough-wide, there has been approximately a 30% increase in general waste and this has contributed to the wider issue, especially around 'side waste'; waste that is not contained within the bins. This issue, coupled with the impact of Covid and the restrictions introduced to ensure safety, has also impacted on our ability to respond.

I trust the above gives you confidence that we continue to take the issue of fly-tipping seriously. We are determined to address this matter throughout the Borough and we are currently looking at options for deploying additional resources."

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13.10, Mr. Nowak asked Councillor Chris McGuinness, the following supplementary question:-

"Thank you for the reply to my question.

In October last year, the Council approved £547,164 grant funding from the Office of PCC for the Home Office Safer Streets Fund, in order to deliver a project in Hexthorpe. It has been mentioned about the Safer Streets Fund in your reply to install additional CCTV and improve lighting, and alley gates. When will this be done, is it happening now and what areas will it be done in?"

Councillor Chris McGuinness gave the following reply:-

"The Safer Streets Fund was only approved in recent months. A programme of works is in place, the equipment is on order and the CCTV and other things will start happening in the coming weeks and months."

The Council considered the 2020 Director of Public Health Annual Report, which was presented by Dr Rupert Suckling.

The report, which was the sixth Annual Report authored by Dr Suckling, detailed the course of the global COVID-19 pandemic in Doncaster and included a rapid assessment of whether health was improving locally. The report also demonstrated how the public health grant was being used locally and how the commissioned services had performed, and identified the role and content of a new Borough Strategy to support the recovery and renewal of Doncaster over the next decade.

Members were informed that the immediate lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic included:-

- Doncaster people, families, communities, businesses, groups and institutions, had all pulled together amazingly, responding to need quickly and effectively;
- The importance of 'key workers' was reinforced during the first national lockdown;
- Not everyone had been impacted equally. Existing inequalities, poverty and social exclusion were highlighted, and the following impacts were felt differently locally:-
 - Impacts directly from COVID
 - Impacts of overwhelmed health services
 - Impacts of changes to health services
 - Impacts of lockdown and other measures
 - Impacts on particular communities and groups
- National decision makers were too remote and lacked the local knowledge needed for many decisions, including the relaxing of the first national lockdown, the re-opening of Schools and return of elite sporting events;
- Pandemic preparation should not be neglected. This included better understanding of how local people lived their lives, investment in health protection, establishing clear, agile, system leadership and supporting better data to aid management as well as increasing transparency; and
- Health and the economy were intrinsically linked and the best way to address the pandemic was good for both health and the economy.

In conclusion, the report made the following five recommendations for Team Doncaster and its partners:-

- Recognise, celebrate and support the role of 'Key workers' in the way Doncaster operated;
- Develop and adopt a new Borough Strategy to spearhead recovery and renewal;

- Continue to develop asset based, community centred approaches to health and wellbeing, working with and for communities;
- Revitalise approaches to health inequalities, poverty and social exclusion; and
- Learn the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to prepare for future public health emergencies in light of the creation of the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) following the review of Public Health England.

RESOLVED that the Director of Public Health's Annual Report for 2020, be noted and be published.

32 Environment and Sustainability Strategy

The Council considered a report, which was presented by Councillor Chris McGuinness, Cabinet Member for Communities, Voluntary Sector and the Environment, which sought approval of the Council's Environment and Sustainability Strategy, which had been developed in response to the climate change and biodiversity emergency declaration made by Full Council in 2019.

In presenting this item, Councillor McGuinness emphasised the importance of the Strategy and pointed out that the climate and biodiversity crisis could not be tackled by any single organisation, group or sector alone, so the partners in 'Team Doncaster' recognised that a partnership approach was essential.

It was reported that the Strategy had been developed by multiple organisations and was based on the latest data and local resident opinion, which had been derived directly from numerous 'Doncaster Talks' exercises, and indirectly via elected representative workshops involving Ward Members, Parish Councils and MPs. Consultation had taken place alongside the work of the Climate and Biodiversity Commission, which had been established following Full Council's Climate Change Emergency declaration. The report and recommendations emanating from the consultation had been published just before Christmas.

Councillor McGuinness highlighted that at the heart of the Strategy, was an ambition to reduce Doncaster's contribution to climate change, protect and improve biodiversity in Doncaster, and become carbon neutral by 2040. He explained that this was consistent with the recommendations of the Climate and Biodiversity Commission and sat alongside a number of key objectives and actions under each topic within the Strategy, which were set out in detail in the report.

Councillor McGuinness also outlined that the Strategy also recognised the inter dependencies between these topics, as well as the links with other strategies such as health and wellbeing, economic growth, and the forthcoming Borough Strategy. He pointed out that the response to these priorities did not start in 2021, as multiple partners had been working to reduce carbon emissions and help protect and enhance biodiversity for a number of years, and whilst some progress had been made, there was a significant way yet to go.

Councillor McGuinness stated that whether that would be further investment in electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, continued improvement of housing and building energy efficiency, increased tree planting, or renewable energy, all partners needed to work collectively to ensure these interventions and impacts were achievable across all sectors, and all localities, so that the sustainability and wellbeing goals identified were realised by everyone.

It was noted that there were numerous supporting strategies and plans that sat beneath the partnership Strategy, and which provided detail on specific activities in specific areas, such as active travel plans, or a public and private sector tree planting. Councillor McGuinness pointed out that some of these supporting strategies were already in existence, but there were others that needed to be developed further, all of which were identified in the section within the Strategy as associated strategies and plans.

In conclusion, Councillor McGuinness emphasised that given the level of partner, resident and member engagement, it was no surprise that the Strategy had been endorsed by the Community and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and the Team Doncaster Partnership Board.

Following the presentation of the report, Members were afforded the opportunity to comment on the Strategy.

RESOLVED that the Environment and Sustainability Strategy, be approved.

33 Proposed Diary of Meetings - 2021/23

The Council considered a report which outlined the draft diary of meetings for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Municipal Years.

Members were informed that in approving an advanced calendar of meetings that encompassed two Municipal Years, it provided Members and Officers with advanced notification of meetings, training or seminars and other key dates, which was particularly helpful for those who needed to organise their time due to other commitments.

It was reported that whilst the proposed calendar covered a two-year period, there would be the opportunity to review the meeting dates for 2022/23 when the 2022/23 to 2023/24 Diary of Meetings was considered by Full Council in May, 2022.

Members noted that the final version of the diary would be agreed at the Annual Meeting of Council in May, 2021 and any amendments between consideration of the draft diary and this meeting, would be incorporated.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the proposed Diary of Meetings for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Municipal Years, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be noted; and
- (2) the final version of the Diary of Meetings be presented to the Annual Meeting of Council in May, 2021, for final approval.

34 Questions by Elected Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 15.2 and 15.3

A. Questions on Notice

No questions on Notice from Elected Members had been received for this meeting.

B. Questions Without Notice

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.2, the Chair of Council sought questions from Elected Members during Question Time.

A. Questions to the Mayor of Doncaster, Ros Jones

Q. Councillor Ian Pearson asked the following question:-

“I am appalled at the behaviour of the local Conservative MP, Nick Fletcher, and his ‘Trumpesque’ attitude to the storm and the bad weather at the moment by using it as a photo opportunity.

A year ago, my colleagues and I along with residents, met with him and he promised that he would do all he could and vote for everything to support the improvements for flooding and other green and blue issues. I suspect that without the hard work and leadership of my colleague, Councillor Lani-Mae Ball, we would not be in the position we are today. I would like to hear your feelings about this unacceptable attitude of this MP to make out he has done everything to help residents or contacted any of them during the flooding in Conisbrough and Denaby?”

A. The Mayor of Doncaster, Ros Jones, gave the following response:-

“We have all been out there assisting with the latest flood alerts we have had, and again, I would like to pay tribute to our staff who have been working 24/7. Nothing should be used as a photo opportunity; it should be about working together to get the funding for Doncaster, and as an MP, I would hope that their motives would be about bringing funding to Doncaster. They have the ability to vote on many things going through Parliament; voting against providing free school meals through the holidays; that did not happen, it took us to move it forward. We actually got the proposal for Universal Credit payments dropped. The latest figures I have indicate the Universal Credit payments are being made to over 9,000 people in Don Valley and over 35,000 within the Borough. Therefore, I ask that they work alongside of all our Councillors to get the best for the Borough. It is deplorable if they do not take the residents’ views into account when voting.”

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7, Councillor Ian Pearson asked the following supplementary question:-

Q. "Is there anything we can do to bring this MP to account with regard to him failing to do what he promised to do for our residents. I feel that he has lied to our residents about what he was going to do for them. I think it is despicable to mislead people who are in such distress and worry over the last 12 months?"

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

"Regular meetings are taking place between our Officers and our MP's. We will continue to write to them to ask them to support us in lobbying for different things. I ask that all three MPs support us rather than just one or two. We need a united front to bring funding to Doncaster, for example, the Hospital. We have been working on this for in excess of three years. Please join us to lobby Government to bring the Hospital and the training that the residents of this Borough deserve."

Q. Councillor Susan Durant asked the following question:-

"The local Conservative MP for Don Valley recently stated that Doncaster Council is to receive an additional £11m in funding for the next financial year; is this correct and if so, what are the plans for this extra funding?"

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

"To put it simply no, it is not correct in the slightest. The vast majority of potential extra funding, roughly £8.6m, would be if we were to increase Council Tax by 5%. So, the actual increase in funding from Government is less than £3m, which does not even cover inflationary or price increase pressures.

I can guarantee that we will not be increasing Council Tax by the 5%, which has been encouraged by Government.

I will be completely honest, there will be an increase in Council Tax, both to address the continued challenges being faced by Social Care and to support other Council services, including to combat fly-tipping. The continued budgetary pressures for Adult Social Care needs addressing at a national level, as we continue to see an ageing population. The Adult Social Care Green Paper has been promised for the past 4 years by successive Conservative Governments, but we are still waiting for this.

We will also be allocating further funding to combat fly-tipping and to help keep our streets clean.

It needs to be noted that we predict a reduction in Council Tax receipts and other income due to the current pandemic, and we will need to support our residents, businesses and Town Centres as part of our Covid response and recovery.

So, the rosy picture around Local Authority funding that the Conservatives choose to promote is sadly not the case."

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7, Councillor Susan Durant asked the following supplementary question:-

Q. "Thank you for setting the record straight and I appreciate your honesty in relation to the difficulty of setting a budget following 10 years of cuts.

I find it completely hypocritical of the local Conservative Group, who have always voted against increasing Council Tax by our considerably smaller increases over the past years.

Do you believe that the local Conservatives actually want to put Council Tax up by 5% at a time when local people and families are struggling or that they did not understand what they were putting out or that they were purposely trying to mislead the people of Doncaster?"

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

"Unfortunately, that is not a question that I can answer. I would hope that it is a simple misunderstanding rather than them trying to purposely mislead the people of Doncaster, but mistakes like this are likely to happen when they simply toe their party line and publish central Conservative communication rather than standing up for Doncaster and challenging their national party and Government to properly fund public services, including Doncaster Council, in order for us to provide the level of services that our residents and businesses deserve.

You will see that we are being asked to increase the Adult Social Care levy by 3%. This should have been taken into account when we have been promised a Green Paper for many years by successive Conservative Governments, and we are still waiting. This is a national requirement and not something that should be placed on Local Authorities."

Q. Councillor Nick Allen asked the following question:-

"Do you feel that using Mayor's Question Time to answer partisan jibes is a sensible approach to Local Government at this time when we ought to be pulling together?"

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

"I believe we are pulling together. However, when questions are asked of me, whoever asks the question, it would be wrong of me not to answer them, but I would also state that when people are putting things out, making false statements, they are raising concerns amongst residents who are very worried, and they are stating that there is a further £11m coming in; please check the facts before you put such statements out because they are wrong."

Q. Councillor Cynthia Ransome asked the following question:-

“Regarding your tweet about every Chemist doing Covid injections, why do you not take advice from the NHS medical professionals. For example, we have five Public Health Mass Immunisation Hub Centres; are these Chemists suitable. Your tweet is misleading and therefore, how do you resolve the anxiety caused to the residents?”

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

“The tweet is actually saying that Chemists can supplement the five areas we have got doing the vaccinations. It is giving people alternatives in order to get the vaccinations that they require, but they will have to stand in line. We have seen misleading statements nationally advising people to travel long distances and we have already discussed this earlier, people can wait to get them locally and I would concur with that statement.”

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7, Councillor Cynthia Ransome asked the following supplementary question:-

Q. “Are these Chemists suitable that you are suggesting and also, is this a political manoeuvre?”

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

“It is not a political manoeuvre. This is stating that we want to get the vaccinations out as quickly as possible in the right environment, and if you look at many of the very large Chemists, they are suitable for undertaking such work, as many Chemists are employed to do the Flu vaccinations.”

Q. Councillor Jane Cox asked the following question:-

“As a matter of clarity, when questions are not on notice and you are not aware of them, how can you be reading from a script and have all the information at your fingertips; it just seems a little staged to me when we are going through what we are going through. It just seems to be let’s slate the Conservative Party today. I want it on record that I think it is quite distasteful. I have never sat here and mentioned your MPs or all the things that they do and don’t do?”

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

“I have many things at my fingertips in order to answer questions that may or may not come up. I can quote the numbers of Universal Credits because it is one thing that I am very aware of, so I will always answer questions that come in where I can and if I cannot answer them, a written response will be given.”

Q. Councillor Majid Kahn asked the following question:-

“You confirmed that the Cabinet and our Officers are doing a fantastic job in briefing you and keeping you up to date which allows you to respond to questions and points which are put forward, and you probably have binders full of documents under your desk that you refer to when you respond to questions without notice?”

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

“As I said, I have always got numerous notes here in front of me because there are many issues which we need the facts and figures at our fingertips. I will not show you, but there are papers all over my desk with different facts and figures, but thank you for reminding people that we have got great Officers and we are given the information we require along with my Cabinet Members, who can answer many of your questions.”

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7, Councillor Majid Kahn asked the following supplementary question:-

Q. “In relation to the MPs and the input they give, is it possible for the Mayor to write to the MP who has been mentioned, to clarify his position on further funding and how he is representing the people of Doncaster?”

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

“We continue to write to all our MPs asking them to support the different avenues of getting funding. We are looking for their backing and I will make the same comment again, the new Hospital, supporting our bid for the Free Port and many other things, so we will continue to write to them.”

Q. Councillor Steve Cox asked the following question:-

“When are the Rule 16 decisions going to be rolled out. If the Elections go ahead as predicted, we could be in Purdah, so when do all the residents see the decisions that have been made under Rule 16?”

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

“I believe Rule 16 documents are available for people to see. They do not have to go through the normal procedures. Most of them are for accepting individual amounts of monies and grants coming forward, and putting that money out to our businesses and our people in order to alleviate them from the effects of the pandemic. All the Rule 16 decisions are there and available for people to see them. If you have any queries or if the answer I have given needs supplementing, you can go to the Director of Corporate Resources who will be able to supply them to you.”

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7, Councillor Steve Cox asked the following supplementary question:-

Q. "It states on a Rule 16 that they will come to Full Council. Can you clarify how many Rule 16s you have personally put forward which it would appear have had no scrutiny?"

A. The Mayor gave the following response:-

"I do not have the figures to hand, but they are put through with no scrutiny on the advice that we need to get the money into the Borough as quickly as possible, and timing is of the essence, especially since we are given very short timescales to get the monies out or spent. The person who can answer when Rule 16s come to Full Council is the Assistant Director of Legal Services, Scott Fawcus."

A. Scott Fawcus gave the following response:-

"The purpose of Rule 16s is to deal with matters which simply cannot wait to follow the normal rules of decision making. These are decisions which need to be implemented immediately, and as you have noticed, there have been far more than we would normally have because we are in the middle of a pandemic and they are pandemic responses. They are subject to discussion with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, who agrees that they are urgent, and they are distributed to all Councillors after they have been made. On an annual basis, we submit a report to Council, which will come to the next Council Meeting, which will identify those Rule 16 decisions which have been taken during this Municipal Year."

B. Questions to the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Glyn Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing and Equalities

There were no questions put to the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Glyn Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing and Equalities.

C. Questions to Councillor Nigel Ball, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure and Culture

There were no questions put to Councillor Nigel Ball, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure and Culture.

D. Questions to Councillor Joe Blackham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene and Trading Services

Q. Councillor Duncan Anderson asked the following question:-

"It was stated recently that Doncaster Council is to receive an additional £5.1m in funding for our highways. Is this accurate and to what extent does it go to cover the backlog of highway works that have built up over the last 10 years of austerity and cuts?"

A. Councillor Joe Blackham gave the following response:-

“The figure of £5.1m is correct. However, there is a timescale attached to this money, which has to be spent by September, which is quite onerous. We have embarked on and put in place strategies to design what highway maintenance schemes can be accommodated within that timeframe because the timeframe is going to be incredibly important. That work is being undertaken as we speak. I expect the £5.1m to be utilised. Regarding the second part of your question, we have a £150m backlog of highway maintenance work in the Borough and the reduction in the Revenue Support Grant of £120m per annum which has taken place over the period of austerity means inevitably, that we will never catch up with that backlog. £5m with a backlog of £150m; you do not need to be a member of Mensa to realise that it is a dent in an enormously difficult situation.”

Q. Councillor Cynthia Ransome asked the following question:-

“This is pre-Covid. A vast amount of money is spent to improve Street Scene with no improvements. What is the cost of this army of consultants and when do you expect to see some results?”

A. Councillor Joe Blackham gave the following response:-

“We had already anticipated that we would have improvements which is why we have implemented a Rapid Improvement Plan; aptly named RIP. Currently, we can describe it as rest in peace. Covid has overtaken everything that we had planned for improving not only Street Scene, but other elements across this Borough. We are in a pandemic, which is demanding considerable time and energy from the management and employees, particularly those forward-facing employees who are out there on the front line, against a background of a diminishing amount of money, and a serious public health situation. Currently, we have had people bagging sand bags who should be sweeping streets and people who should be doing remedial work around burial grounds, who are assisting with the flooding. The combination of flooding and Covid-19 means we are no way near where we would like to be.

What I can advise you is that we have changed the RIP and replaced it with what is called an Environmental Street Scene Improvement Plan, because of the recognition that both the environment and Street Scene are not things that will happen in isolation; they happen collectively. Grounds maintenance is going to be a fundamental part of our environmental strategy moving forward. We have recognised that, and at the appropriate time, which will be post-pandemic, we will see improvements. A report will be prepared, which will be shared with all Councillors when we get Officer time to facilitate that. At this point in time, the Officers at this Authority are under the cosh; I understand that.

I am the Portfolio Holder for a very sensitive service which impacts on people more acutely than many others, but I also recognise the difficulties in meeting that programme of works. I also recognise that there has not been the improvements that we thought would happen, but I understand perfectly the reasons why.”

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7, Councillor Cynthia Ransome asked the following supplementary question:-

Q. “I did state this was pre-Covid and I understand about the consultation that went out. I did request to see this pre-Covid, but it was not forthcoming. I accept everything you have said and all the work the Officers are doing regarding Covid. The Officers are doing an excellent job, I accept that, but I did state it was pre-Covid?”

A. Councillor Joe Blackham gave the following response:-

“Street Scene was understaffed by 28 operators. This is a huge proportion pre-Covid. We have had extreme difficulties recruiting to those posts. Currently, we have 10 vacancies in Street Scene. This situation is totally unacceptable. Nobody wants to see dirty streets. We have provided the funding for the Officers of this Authority to employ the additional staff we require, but getting those staff through the door is incredibly difficult. Recently at Cabinet, we had a discussion in relation to this very topic, and what we have said quite clearly is, if we need to change our HR arrangements to facilitate an easier access for people to come to the Authority, we will give that due consideration, but we do not just want anybody just to fill a vacancy, we want people to be fully participating members of what we perceive to be an improving service.”

Q. Councillor Nick Allen asked the following question:-

“Would you be willing to take steps to allow Ward Members to attend meetings of the Assets Board when it takes decisions over assets which are in their respective Wards?”

A. Councillor Joe Blackham gave the following response:-

“It is a debate we have had before and at this point in time, there is no, and will be, no provision to do so. I personally do not feel very strongly about it one way or the other; I just do not see what you would bring to the party. Elected Members get the opportunity to discuss and agree what should happen with every facet of business that takes place in the Assets Board. It is an asset strategic decision making Board. We have examples of it influencing the decisions made every time we have a meeting.”

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7, Councillor Nick Allen asked the following supplementary question:-

Q. "I am disappointed and I know it is a debate we have had before. Would you be willing to allow full minutes of these meetings to be made available to Ward Members or be made publically available?"

A. Councillor Joe Blackham gave the following response:-

"There is no problem as far as I am concerned; they should be publically available. All the business of this Authority should be in the public domain when decisions are taken. We may have to redact certain elements where financial implications are involved, but there should be no problem."

E. Questions to Councillor Rachael Blake, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

In the absence of Councillor Rachael Blake, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, the Chair of Council informed Members that any questions for Councillor Blake should be submitted in writing to the Executive Office after the meeting, and a response would be provided accordingly.

F. Questions to Councillor Nuala Fennelly, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools

In the absence of Councillor Nuala Fennelly, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, the Chair of Council informed Members that any questions for Councillor Fennelly should be submitted in writing to the Executive Office after the meeting, and a response would be provided accordingly.

G. Questions to Councillor Chris McGuinness, Cabinet Member for Communities, Voluntary Sector and the Environment

There were no questions put to Councillor Chris McGuinness, Cabinet Member for Communities, Voluntary Sector and the Environment.

H. Questions to Councillor Bill Mordue, Cabinet Member for Business, Skills and Economic Development

There were no questions put to Councillor Bill Mordue, Cabinet Member for Business, Skills and Economic Development.

I. Questions to Councillor Jane Nightingale, Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate Services

There were no questions put to Councillor Jane Nightingale, Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate Services.

J. Questions to Councillor Austen White, Chair of the Audit Committee

There were no questions put to Councillor Austen White, Chair of the Audit Committee.

K. Questions to Councillor Phil Cole, Chair of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee

There were no questions put to Councillor Phil Cole, Chair of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee.

L. Questions to Councillor Rachael Blake, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board

In the absence of Councillor Rachael Blake, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Chair of Council informed Members that any questions for Councillor Blake should be submitted in writing to the Executive Office after the meeting, and a response would be provided accordingly.

M. Questions to Councillor Jane Kidd, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Q. Councillor Phil Cole asked the following question:-

“I understand that Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) have held a review of how Councillor Ward Budgets have operated. Please can you give us some insight into the findings from the review?”

A. Councillor Jane Kidd gave the following response:-

“As people may remember, pre-Covid, the Mayor asked OSMC to carry out a consultation exercise on how Ward Budgets, or the Councillor Small Grant Scheme, should be run. We carried out that consultation and the scheme was rolled out, but the scheme coincided with an unprecedented pandemic, which was obviously a particular challenge. We held a Review Workshop yesterday and some of the main points that came out are as follows. £144,000 out of £165,000 has been spent so far. 91 Groups have received funding. The highest spending areas are Food Banks, which took £70,000; take from that what you will. Probably it is a sad reflection on food poverty within the Borough. Other big spending areas were arts and crafts activities for isolated vulnerable people and IT to connect people, and sustaining existing Groups.

Many projects were supported by other funding, such as the Mayor’s Fight Back Fund, and many Councillors pooled their budget. Food Banks benefitted hundreds of families and the funding also supported an army of volunteers.

Some of the more unusual projects included supporting a local radio station to keep people connected and the installation of IT devices to enable a Church to live stream services and activities.

Some very small outlays have produced some significant results. We have alluded today to how decisions and funding needs to be as close to communities as possible.

It is fair to say that there was a consensus that the scheme has been a success and there was a desire to build on it in the future. We did feel that it would actually influence Council policy, for example, making it easier for communities to work with the Council on environment issues.

Councillors were grateful for the support they received for getting digitally connected and ongoing support will be needed for connecting with communities.

I would like to thank all Councillors who attended yesterday and acknowledge all the support we have received from Officers to start working remotely.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to highlight the review.”

35 To receive the minutes of the following Joint Authorities

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following Joint Authorities be noted:-

- A. Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority Board held on 21st September and 16th November, 2020.
- B. Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership Board held on 10th September and 5th November, 2020.
- C. South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority held on 12th October and 23rd November, 2020.
- D. South Yorkshire Pensions Authority held on 30th September, 2020.
- E. South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel held on 7th September and 10th November, 2020.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____