

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF EXECUTIVE
COUNCILLORS AT THE COUNCIL EXECUTIVE
MEETING 3rd SEPTEMBER 2003
(Agenda item 6)**

1. Question from Rae Harris

As Consultation Co-ordinator for Action for Pensioners, and with public consultation on the Draft Community Strategy due to close on 15th September, I would like to ask the Leader of the Council (and Chair of the Local Strategic Partnership) the following question(s):

- What are the key partnerships for the three Priority Areas of Transport, Learning & Skills and Health & Social Care?
- Are there key partnerships for the two earlier priority areas of Community Safety and Culture, Leisure & Sport, and if so, what are they?
- Are the targets listed for each of the six Priority Areas intended to become the Council's main strategic targets, ie: are all parts of the Council working to the same agenda?

I am seeking clarification in order that I can consider how best Action for Pensioners should pursue its links with the Council in these areas.

Answer to be given by the Leader of the Council, Executive Councillor Paul Crossley

The key partnership information you requested is as follows:

Learning and Skills: the Bath and North East Somerset Learning Partnership

Health and Social Care: the Bath and North East Somerset Health Improvement and Modernisation Partnership Board

Community Safety: the Bath and North East Somerset Community Safety Partnership

Transport and Culture, Leisure and Sport do not yet have their own specific key theme partnerships. For this reason, the LSP has adopted an approach whereby the Executive members reflecting these theme areas (Cllr Sir Elgar Jenkins and Cllr Nicole O'Flaherty respectively) serve on the LSP on an interim basis to reflect these themes. Work on developing these Key Partnerships so they can report into the LSP in the same way as the other Key Partnerships is under way. Progress on this will be reported in due course.

The targets contained in the Community Strategy consultation documents reflect a wide range of targets which reflect the proposed key theme areas. Where these targets are Council Best Value Performance Indicators they are published in the Council's Performance Plan and link into the council's own

performance planning processes. However, the main reason for producing a Community Strategy is so that we can reflect the wider partnership working going on in our community, not just the Council's own work, extensive though that it is in scope. For that reason, the theme areas also reflect targets which are the responsibility of other agencies and partnerships to deliver. The challenge for all public agencies, not just the Council, will be to link the priorities that will ultimately be agreed in the Community Strategy (which is currently now in draft form and, as Mr Harris notes, is subject to current consultation) to their own plans, strategies and resources in order to work together for the local community.

2. Question from Councillor Brian Barrett

Following the agreement by the then Executive Member for Transportation and Planning Policy last September that a start to re-organisation of the Priority Access Point at Northgate would be made this year, would the current Executive Member tell us what progress has been made, both in terms of design of the arrangement and its introduction?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Sir Elgar Jenkins OBE

Work has been carried out in a number of areas:

Car parking and signage:

A site visit was held with members of the Chamber of Commerce to review short improvements to car park signage and some small scale improvements made. Funding has been allocated to carry out a signage audit to remove unnecessary and confusing signage and a contract will soon be let to begin removal of redundant "no waiting at any time" plates and posts.

Walcot Street

The walking route scheme is progressing. Money is in the capital programme to improve pavement areas in Walcot Street

Parking strategy and development

A series of meetings have been held with the Chamber of Commerce and funding allocated to schemes to introduce pay on foot for Avon Street and Charlotte Street car parks and Variable Message Signing to indicate routes and spaces at both car parks and park and ride sites.

The First Bus Quality Partnership

Good progress has been made on improving infrastructure on the No. 13 Showcase Bus route which runs through the Priority Access Point

Overall

A general review of the whole of the central area is under consideration involving a number of departments and progress is expected on the whole of the central area including the Bus Gate area as a result of this review.

Supplementary question

Would the Executive Member indicate, therefore, whether money has been allocated in the Transport Capital Programme 2003/04 to pay for the redesign and implementation of the Priority Access Point scheme?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Sir Elgar Jenkins OBE

No, it's not.

3. Question from Councillor Tim Warren

Just before the end of Wansdyke Council, Parish Councils were given money to fund new play equipment. However, these Councils do not have the money to pay for essential repairs.

This is an on-going issue that needs addressing. What does the Executive member propose to resolve this problem?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Nicole O'Flaherty

When Wansdyke District Council provided this money, no financial provision was made to fund ongoing maintenance.

Repairs, maintenance and refurbishment at sites managed by the Parish Councils are the responsibility of the Parish Councils.

Recognising the difficulties faced by Parish Councils and as the result of previous consideration of this issue by the Council's former Community, Culture and Leisure Committee, this Council's Parks section now offers expert advice to Parish Councils and has made available our play equipment inspection service.

We have recently put forward a bid for funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's "Liveability Fund" which includes funding safety improvements to these areas. This bid has received the support of the Parish Councils through ALCA.

In the longer term, the Council is initiating a parks strategy (for which separate central government support has been sought) and this will involve consideration of the quantity and quality of provision of all types of open space including those managed by external bodies (eg Housing Associations

and Parish Councils) so that a consistent approach to levels and quality of provision can be adopted across Bath & North East Somerset in the future.

Supplementary question

Since looking into this issue, I have discovered that the Council do offer assistance in bulk buying and technical help. Is it possible to make Parish Councils more aware of this.

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Nicole O'Flaherty

Yes, I will do so.

4. Question from Councillor Michael Ringham (Nominee to be Councillor Chris Watt)

It has been proposed that a mobile phone mast is to be constructed on land at Lansdown Road, Bath.

- Given that the proposed mast is below 15 metres in height, will the proposal be considered under the regular planning process?
- What consultation with local residents will be undertaken?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Rosemary Todd

There is no record of a current proposal for a telecom installation in Lansdown Road

We have had a pre-application enquiry for St. Stephen's Church, which has not been followed up as yet.

General Advice

(1) Installations under 15 m. are permitted development provided they are not located within a Conservation Area or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (within these areas all installations (with the exception of some very minor developments under 2 cubic metres in size) require planning permission). Operators are still required to give prior notification to the Local Planning Authority seeking approval of design and siting. This allows the Local Planning Authority to consider the details of the proposal, but not the principle.

(2) Local residents and local Members would be consulted in the usual way.

N.B: There is a requirement that telecom operators consult the local community before submitting any proposal to the Local Planning Authority. Perhaps this explains the situation on the Lansdown Road site.

5. Question from Councillor Charles Gerrish

Jobcentreplus are intending to close a number of Job Centres in Bath and North East Somerset, including the area I represent in Keynsham.

What is the Executive Councillor doing to ensure that any closures will not adversely effect people looking for jobs in the area?

Will the Executive Councillor impress upon Jobcentreplus the need to thoroughly consult with local communities before any closures are made?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Colin Darracott

JobCentre Plus wrote to the Council at the end of July to inform us of the proposed changes. These proposals have been presented, not as a paper for consultation, but as a proposal to be implemented.

For a variety of reasons, it has not been possible to set up a meeting with the District Manager to discuss the proposal and the implications for the Bath and North East Somerset area, until tomorrow (4th Sept 2003).

Officers from the Council will be discussing in detail how the proposed changes will affect residents, whether looking for jobs, or seeking information on making a claim for benefit.

I have also asked that the matter be raised at the West of England Strategic Partnership Board, in order that the changes can be discussed at a sub-regional level, as these changes also affect other parts of the former Avon area.

You can also be assured that we will be asking JobCentre Plus to make appropriate arrangements to meet with and consult the local communities affected by the changes, before any closures are made.

Supplementary question

If faced with no movement, does the Council have alternative proposals?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Colin Darracott

I will be investigating this.

6. Question from Councillor Brian Barrett

With regard to the Housing and Supported Living Services 4-monthly Performance report (item 16 on the agenda), could the Executive Member please explain whether the list of approved development partnerships was used?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Vic Pritchard

It is assumed that in asking this question Councillor Brian Barrett is referring to the entry in the 4-monthly Performance Report that reads as follows: *Six potential RSL partners for the EPH Re-provision project have been shortlisted and tender documents have been issued. The successful RSL will manage the 'extra care' elements of the new "Centres of Excellence" with care being provided by Council staff*".

As Cllr Barrett is aware, Bath & North East Somerset has a Joint Commissioning Partnership for housing. The Registered Social Landlords appointed to this Partnership are: Somer, Knightstone, Guinness, Orbit, and Western Challenge. These are Bath & North East Somerset Council's approved development partners.

However, the search for an RSL partner to develop and fulfil the Landlord functions of the sheltered and extra care housing elements of the Elderly Persons' Homes Strategy was not restricted to these approved development partners.

In accordance with the formal decision taken on 10 March 2003 following consultation with Housing & Social Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel and others, the bidding process for an RSL partner was openly advertised in the trade journal for RSLs. Bids have been considered to determine the "value added" by each potential RSL partner and the process being followed is in accordance with the Project Partnering Contract 2000 regime, which is the agreed form of Contract for the Elderly Persons' Homes.

Supplementary question

What is the point of having such a list if it's not used?

Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Vic Pritchard

The idea was to extend the scope. Consultation was done wider in the process to get the best possible result.

Statement to the Council Executive

Cllr Chris Watt (Midsomer Norton Redfield, Conservative)

The Environmental Standard of the River Somer

I have been made aware of the poor environmental standards in and around the River Somer in the Midsomer Norton area. These standards particularly relate to weeds growing around the banks and the slow flow of the river due to a build-up of silt and grime.

The Norton-Radstock Chamber of Commerce highlighted these issues some fourteen months ago. Although the Council Executive visited the site in July 2002, no demonstrable progress has been made toward resolving the problem of these environmental standards.

It is noted that a daily litter pick is now in progress but this was only a small part of the problem. I am also aware of a report going to the link group that sets out some issues but does not have any definitive action attached to it, the officer who compiled it has now left the council.

I would like to request that the Executive Member responsible for environmental standards in rivers consider following:

- Develop a detailed action plan with the Chamber of Commerce, and other relevant interest groups to improve the environmental standard of the River Somer;
- Include in that plan proposals to:
 - Clear the weeds from the side of the river.
 - Expedite the river to clear it of excess silt and grime.
 - Explore options for gravel or paved beds to reduce the build up of silt.
 - Negotiate with the Environment Agency over water levels in order to maintain a healthy flow.
 - Guarantee high environmental standards on the river in the future.

Comments on the Statement to the Council Executive

Executive Councillor Rosemary Todd

The Environmental Standard of the River Somer

The River Somer is classified as a "Main River" and as such would normally have flood protection maintenance undertaken by the Environment Agency (EA). However since construction of the Midsomer Norton flood relief tunnel the EA have taken the view that such work is unnecessary as the flows now conveyed are for amenity value only, and responsibility for routine maintenance rests with riparian owners. Whilst not accepting the EA's stance the local authority has historically, undertaken maintenance and cleansing of the open reach that runs through High Street, Midsomer Norton.

The unsightly conditions, which prevail during low flow conditions, have been the subject of complaint over several years. Prior to the introduction of a number of weirs by the Former Wansdyke Council, as a means of ensuring the entire channel was filled with water, large shoals of silt and detritus built up along the margins of the river and gave rise to smells and poor visual amenity.

Whilst the weirs have achieved an overall improvement, settlement of water borne silt and debris in the channel continues to be a problem. The silt is of sufficient depth in some areas to be a significant hazard to the public, retain large quantities of litter and pose a problem for routine maintenance and cleansing. Direct Services currently operate daily litter clearance operations including Saturdays and Sundays.

With regard to the proposed action plan, Direct Services are currently investigating a number of potential measures that would achieve environmental improvement of the river including removal of the silt and placement of a gravel bed. Whilst this work will enable a safer and more efficient cleansing regime, the appearance of the river will largely remain unaltered. Implementation of this work will be subject to the availability of adequate funding and formal Land Drainage Consent by the Environment Agency.

Removal of weed growth from the channel side walls is a relatively straightforward operation and should be undertaken on a twice yearly basis to prevent damage to the wall structure.

A principal problem with the river is low flow conditions which, develop during periods of dry weather. During prolonged dry periods, river flows almost become non-existent thereby causing the water retained behind the weirs to become stagnant and foul smelling. This situation is often misunderstood by members of the public who perceive the apparent lack of water as being due to flows being diverted to the flood relief tunnel. During such conditions all flow is passed forward to the river.