

Council - 27 September 2012
Agenda item 15 – Members' Questions

1. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay

When will the Mayor bring forward proposals for a full joint customer service centre in Wallsend, as detailed in Council policy, and will she organise for the current provision to be open on Saturday for the convenience of the public and encourage greater footfall in the centre of Wallsend?

Answer

Planning Committee on 18 September 2012 approved plans for the redevelopment of the Forum Shopping Centre.

Options to include a full service Customer First Centre are currently being explored. The outcome of these considerations together with any financial implications will be considered as part of the budget proposals in November.

On the matter of increased opening hours for the existing Customer Services Centre, the current arrangements are temporary. However, the intention is to co-locate Customer Services and the Library into a new Customer First Centre for Wallsend, at that point consideration will be given to the most appropriate opening hours for the service as part of the overall operating model for the new facility.

2. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay

Would the Mayor inform us of the number of apprenticeships generated in North Tyneside since 2010?

Answer

North Tyneside Council continues to take a strategic lead in promoting Apprenticeships with employers across the borough and has established successful links with the Business Forum and other business networks in North Tyneside.

Between 2010-11 and 2011-12 the total number of young people and adults from North Tyneside on Apprenticeship programmes was 5,662.

3. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay

Following the recent flash floods in various areas in North Tyneside, I have been contacted by a number of residents about the proposed housing developments on green areas of Wallsend. What steps has the Council taken to estimate and manage the increase of water run off and drainage from those parts of the town affected by planning proposals?

Answer

Flood Risk Assessment of planning applications is undertaken by applicants in accordance with the guidance provided within the National Planning Policy Framework. The Environment Agency are consulted on major planning applications and they review the flood risk assessments as part of the consultee role.

4. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M A Finlay

How many retail units have closed in Wallsend in the last two years?

Answer

There are 9 more vacant retail units than in September 2012.

5. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor P Oliver

At the Council meeting in July it was reported that the gullies at the top of Coach Lane, a main road were blocked with soil and had grass growing from them. On Monday 17th September the situation has not changed. Can the Mayor or Cabinet member guarantee a date by which the gullies will be cleared?

Answer

The gully at the top of Coach Lane has been cleared.

6. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor S Hill

Flooding in Rocket Way has been a problem for many years, caused by water running off inadequately drained fields owned by the Council and street gullies not being kept unblocked through regular attention. Will the Mayor specify a date when she will meet residents at one of their regular Tuesday evening meetings?

Answer

As part of the work of the Flooding Task Group issues such as gully cleansing and the impact of surface water running off fields and agricultural land has been the subject of much discussion. Options around these matters will be concluded as part of the final report of that Group.

A letter has been sent to all residents affected by flooding to let them know what the Council along with its partners are doing to help identify appropriate solutions and minimise the disruption caused by flooding.

A number of residents have also been visited.

7. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor A Austin

Can the Elected Mayor update members on the exam results from the Borough's schools this summer?

Answer

This has been another excellent year for the educational achievement of children and young people across the borough. Whilst the latest 2012 results are still provisional, there has been a sustained improvement for each of the key stages.

North Tyneside has continued to improve at Key Stage 2 and now tops the region for this.

- All schools are above the current floor target of 60% attainment.
- The percentage attaining level 4 or above in English and Maths continues to rise and now stands at 83%, compared to 78% in 2011.

The GCSE results show that:

- Overall performance for 5+A*-C including English and Maths is 61%. This is 2.7% higher than last year and continues an improving trend.
- All secondary schools are above the national floor target of 40%.
- Achieving 2 or more "good sciences" has increased by 9% since 2011.

Post-16 results continue to improve year on year with our highest ever levels of achievement at Key Stage 5:

- Compared with last year the average point score per student measure has increased by 4.5 points and the average point score per entry has increased by 3.7 points.
- This performance would place us above the 2011 national average.

We have seen continued progress and achievement for our looked after children and young people, making us one of the highest performing areas nationally:

- 33% achieved GCSEs 5+A*-C including English and Maths, up from 8% the previous year.
- 73% achieved 5+A*-C GCSEs, compared with 25% the previous year.

This is testament to the excellent standards of education within our schools and down to the hard work and dedication of staff and pupils and all those who support them.

8. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor K Barrie

Could the Elected Mayor give the Council an update on the progress of the building of Council housing and on the Quality Homes for the Future, and her commitment to both these projects? Can she also tell members what consultation she has had with ward members?

Answer

The Council have moved a step closer to the completion of this process and are now able to select the most suitable company to take this project forward.

Two companies have already been involved in extensive discussion with the Council about how they would carry out the refurbishment and construction work.

This is yet another hurdle that the Council have managed to get through and will now help us move even closer to providing our residents with high quality homes that will better meet their needs.

9. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor Mrs S E Mortimer

Could the Elected Mayor confirm when Jules Rutherford, Labour member for Wallsend ward, last attended a Council meeting, a committee meeting or a ward surgery and whether or not she is still in receipt of her taxpayer funded members' allowance? If the Elected Mayor does not have all the information, could she write to the leader of the Labour group to obtain information and release the answer into the public domain?

Answer

The last Council or committee meeting attended by Councillor Rutherford was the full Council meeting held on 4 July 2012, Councillor Rutherford is still in receipt of her basic allowance under the Council's Members' Allowances Scheme.

[Please note the above response was prepared prior to the receipt of Councillor J Rutherford's resignation as a Member of the Council].

10. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Ord

Would the Mayor inform us of her considerations on the effect of charging for brown bin collections on the poorest residents who would previously have received Council Tax Benefit on the cost as it was included in the Council Tax?

Answer

The charge for brown bin collections was agreed by Council as part of the alternative budget on 1 March 2012.

In doing so the Council made a decision that was in line with our neighbouring authorities. All merits of the proposal were considered as part of this change and the charge was kept at the lowest end of those charged by other local authorities.

Alternatives for residents include composting and bin sharing.

11. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Ord

Would the Mayor inform us of the reasoning for a minimum charge of 20% of the full Council Tax on people with low wages as part of the change to Council Tax Benefit?

Answer

This is part of the proposed Localised Council Tax Support Scheme which is currently out for consultation.