

MEETING OF FULL COUNCIL – 7 MARCH 2022

AGENDA ITEM 7

QUESTIONS RECEIVED PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 9

1) *Question to the Leader of the Council, from Councillor David Cotton – Local Ward Member for Saxilby*

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that no one would disagree that this council's best asset are the staff, officers and the DSO operatives who work for us, often unsung; but would be missed if not there, or the functions they perform were not undertaken. I am sure my joint question recipients also would fully agree.

Many people, I am sure, would be surprised to learn that the local government pay rise for April 2021 has yet to be implemented. This is largely due to a dispute between the Unions and the employers. As I understand it, and without too much emphasis on any political ramifications, on my part, it is understood the Unions were holding out for a 10% increase and the Employers were offering 1%. I believe the gap has narrowed slightly with the Unions looking for 7% and the Employers looking for 1.75%. I do not believe 10%, or indeed 7% is sustainable, though personally, I would pay more than that for the quality of work we have from our staff.

The pay rise will be back dated to April 2021 when it is finally (if ever) settled. This has taken nearly a year and the pay rise for April 2022 is only five or six weeks away.

Furthermore, I understand that the Unions, UNITE, UNISON and the GMB have all balloted; or are in the process of balloting members over strike action. Both UNISON and UNITE have failed to meet the majority needed to legally strike and the GMB have, or had, yet to publish its results.

Meanwhile we are in a period where inflation is at around 6% and predicted to rise to at least 7% and perhaps higher. We have seen unprecedented rises in energy costs for fuel both domestic and transport. We are told there are households having to decide on food or heating but not both and it is predicted that something like 40% of households are in fuel poverty, and that includes some households where there are two wage earners in a home.

Not so many years ago our staff here were largely union members and most were members of UNISON and a few of the JMB. Now, I believe, the membership of the unions is likely to be well below 50% of the staff, and accept that senior officers will be members of their relevant professional bodies. I also accept that while non union staff are not directly in this "fight", they do benefit from any potential work the unions undertake to improve wages and conditions.

It is also fair to say that we as a council pay a living wage, rather than standard flat rate and some years ago, I and another Councillor successfully pushed for some lower pay tiers within the council to be scrapped and those staff raised up the spinal column to new levels.

We have now moved the depot to a central location, long overdue with a first-class facility, but that means some of our staff on the lowest pay scales have to travel to work in a vehicle whereas quite a few walked or cycled to each depot in Market Rasen and Gainsborough.

There has already be some concern about refuse freighter HGV drivers potentially leaving with the rather lucrative market for such drivers being high. We hear of some firms paying up to £40,000 in “golden hello” payments for such drivers. To lose our drivers at this time would leave us in a recruitment drive we would be unlikely to fulfil, and frankly if I had the skills necessary, I would certainly think about moving if the benefits were that high.

Given the whole state of this, and the parlous state of the economy globally, could my three question recipients say if there are ways we, as a council, can help ease the burden on our staff, especially the lower paid and those in single parent families or with dependent children?

My concern in this was mis-understood in our last meeting over the question of members allowances, but I would not dwell on that, but wish to focus on the staff we have and retaining them; but also doing what we can as an “Investor in People” to do just that and invest in our staff.

It is unlikely the pay award will be less than the 1% offered by the employers at the start of this process, and so could we unilaterally offer 1% now?

Are there other measures we can take to help where we can?

Are there mechanisms in place whereby a member of staff can speak to senior staff confidentially about money struggles or worries and get help and advice?

Is it possible to pay wage advances, albeit with conditions, which would be better alternatives to high commercial borrowing or credit card balances in cases where an employee has specific issues or cannot get loans or credit cards?

I freely admit that, as Chair of the JSCC, I know the answers to some of this but wanted the whole issue in the public domain and minuted as a council record.

Thank you
Rev. Cllr. David J. Cotton J.P. ADipR”

2) Question to the Chairman of the Prosperous Communities Committee, from Councillor Jim Snee – Local Ward Member for Gainsborough North

“Persistent incidents of anti-social behaviour is a common issue , and in my opinion now effect, the majority of Wards within the district.

Could the chairman please inform members how many Community Triggers this authority has dealt with during the past two years , and a breakdown of those incidents.

Councillor Jim Snee”

**3) Question to the Leader of the Council, from Councillor Stephen Bunney –
Local Ward Member for Market Rasen**

“What plans do WLDC have to work alongside local housing associations and other charities to provide accommodation and other support for potential refugees from The Ukraine. There are a number of empty buildings in the district – including Rasen House, formerly The Grange, that can ‘easily’ be adapted for both short term and long term residences.

Councillor Stephen Bunney “

**4) Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor John McNeill –
Local Ward Member for Market Rasen**

"We are very fortunate in West Lindsey to have immutable decisions made on planning applications, whether by Officers of the Council or by the Planning Committee. As West Lindsey Conservatives promised in our manifesto we have ensured that Parish and Town Councils have the opportunity to "Call-In" planning applications to the Planning Committee for determination, just like District Councillors.

However, one area of continued frustration for many, not just Parish and Town Councillors, but the people who live and work in West Lindsey, is the way that the conditions applied to planning applications are enforced once the development begins (or is permitted to continue where retrospective permission has been sought).

Can the Leader confirm how the conditions on planning developments are enforced and monitored, as well as reported to members of this Council? How are changes, if any, to the conditions applied to planning developments managed and approved, and how are these made visible to Members of this Council?

Can he confirm how many conditions on Planning developments are currently outstanding and of those how many are overdue for implementation? Has any assessment been made of the overdue conditions as to how likely (or otherwise) these will be complied with, and if so, can he share the detail with Members? If no assessment has been made, how can the Planning Enforcement Team be said to be operating in the public interest, especially when there is clear, yet I accept anecdotal, evidence that this is important to many people, not just some members of this Council?

Councillor John McNeill”