

COUNCIL MEETING – 23 FEBRUARY 2011

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

AGENDA ITEM 5 - COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT TIME**5 (i) Questions with notice by members of the public****1. Question to the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University from Mr Ed Murphy:**

Last year two authorities, Peterborough and Slough, received additional funding for exceptional circumstances based on English as an Additional Language (**EAL**) children; this was for **new** EAL children. Peterborough received almost £1m. You then top sliced for professional development and access to the DoE recruitment service. 50% (£420k) was distributed to schools based on EAL numbers and 50% based on the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (**AWPU**). This meant that West Town got £20484 for 221 EAL pupils worth £92 per child. A school (like Wittering for example) got £3906 for one EAL pupil. As this money was specifically to deal with the impact of immigration, mobility and EAL children this distribution of funds was unfair and a discriminatory practice.

Does the Cabinet Member regret the Conservative lead government's axing of this grant for Peterborough and can he explain why, when extra money was made available for these children, this Conservative Council choose to discriminate against the very children the Conservative Member of Parliament for Peterborough is now saying the government should help with more cash?

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University responded:

It is worth reminding ourselves that the Labour Government allowed 3 million migrants into this country leading to 96 different languages being spoken in our schools, causing us to be fairly well down the league tables in terms of results, because they were only in the schools for an average of a couple of years before they took their exams, and they only achieve at 18%. I would like to ask Members, in my reply it talks about the Schools Forum. Now the Schools Forum is a completely independent body made up of all head teachers from across the spectrum in Peterborough, not all head teachers from every school but special schools, secondary schools and primary schools. All there on behalf of their colleagues. So in response, in 2009/10 the local authority did indeed receive an allocation of £978k for its growth in EAL pupil numbers. Following a discussion with Schools Forum on the 24th February 2010 a working group was established (consisting of Schools Forum members) to develop the methodology for distributing this funding to schools. The methodology agreed was to top-slice the grant by £50,000 to target at specific projects. A large proportion of the centrally retained element was used to purchase EMAS UK, translation software, for all schools. The remainder of the grant was distributed to schools; 50% on EAL numbers and 50% on weighted pupil numbers (AWPU). West Town's allocation of £20,484 consisted of £4,040.13 for weighted pupil numbers and £16,444.32 for EAL pupil numbers. Wittering's allocation of £3,906 consisted of £3,832.46 for weighted pupil numbers and £74.41 for EAL pupil numbers.

The justification for distributing 50% of the funding on weighted pupil numbers (AWPU)

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| | <p>was that EAL pupils within the authority draw down additional resources from other formula factors i.e. deprivation, low prior attainment and pupil turnover. It could be argued that this has resulted in a reduction in AWPU funding over the years as funding has been targeted at these factors. Interestingly if the DFE formula has been used to distribute this funding to schools both Wittering and West Town would not have received any funding as the allocations were based on growth in EAL of more than 2.5%.</p> <p>Although the Exceptional Circumstances Grant (ECG) has now ended the government have mainstreamed the £1.5m received in 2010/11 into Peterborough's DSG allocation for 2011/12. It will therefore become permanent budget. On the 16th February 2011 Schools Forum committed to use this funding to create an EAL factor within the Peterborough's Schools Funding Formula. This factor will result in this funding being allocated to schools based on the number of EAL pupil's it has on roll in January plus an allocation for pupils of Gypsy/Traveller heritage.</p> <p>Mr Ed Murphy asked the following supplementary question:</p> <p>In the question, I did ask whether you regretted the cut that this Government had made to Peterborough in the exceptional circumstances and also while the debate is going on nationally at the moment; do you think that the current formula which is weighted heavily in free school meals is actually a good idea or do you agree with the Member of Parliament who is arguing that it's not a good idea?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University responded:</p> <p>I think as I said, instead of about £1m we are going to get £1.5m and it's going into our pooled budget so it should be there for ever and a day and on the free school meals; yes I do agree with the MP, its not reasonable to suggest that we should base our migrant numbers on free school meals as a lot of them aren't entitled to free school meals and don't know how to claim it if they were. And they are probably some of the most deprived people in the city, so I think to try and add something to the pupil premium was the right way to go.</p> |
| 2. | <p>Mr Ed Murphy asked the Leader of the Council:</p> <p>What is the total amount of money this Council has lost so far in cuts from the Conservative lead Government's reduced settlement for the forthcoming year; from cuts to and axing of Grants including the Immigration Impact Fund, area grants and other special funds provided under the previous Labour Government?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Resources responded on behalf of the Leader of the Council:</p> <p>The reduction in formula grant has been outlined in our budget documentation already, and we have shared the full impact of all grant reductions with the public through Scrutiny and through our neighbourhood meetings. Indeed I specifically mentioned it in my speech to Cabinet recommending this budget.</p> <p>However, just to repeat that information, the total grant reduction for 2011/12 is £15m, including nearly £9m of Formula Grant, and nearly £6m of former specific and area based grants.</p> <p>The council expected to receive £337k from the Migration Impact Fund in 2010/11. This was subsequently reduced to £169k as the fund was ceased mid year. The previous government intended to review this grant in 2011/12 to see whether sufficient migrant fees were being received to cover the cost of the grant.</p> |

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| | <p>Mr Ed Murphy asked the following supplementary question:</p> <p>Could I ask you whether these cuts which you've said are £15m plus; when I looked at your papers which I got after I had to submit the question; I calculate at about £26m with no allowance for inflation or other pressure costs; will you be implementing these cuts as vigorously as you implemented the refurbishment of Cathedral Square?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Resources, on behalf of the Leader of the Council, responded:</p> <p>Probably more vigorously Mr Murphy, the last Labour Government didn't have the courage to set out in detail the cuts they admitted were needed, the current opposition have said that it's a blank sheet of paper, here in Peterborough we have actually provided the detail behind what we are going to do, we've had four months of challenge on that which I think we have all really appreciated the input we've had from the public, unions and staff so I think; more vigorously? I don't think that Cathedral Square has gone quite as we would have liked but we will do it more vigorously.</p> |
| 3. | <p>Mr Peter Ward asked the Cabinet Member for Resources:</p> <p>How much has been paid out in redundancy payments both voluntary and mandatory since the general election, how much is expected to be budgeted to pay for redundancies for the rest of this financial year and what amount is in the budgeted redundancy fund for next financial year?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Resources responded:</p> <p>Redundancy payments to date, since the General Election for Council employed Staff, amounts to £2.3m. The amount we expected to pay for the rest of the financial year is £1.1m.</p> <p>These are of course one off payments and this approach will see the Council release staff costs of £5.8m per year (note that total savings will be lower than this as there will be some costs of departmental restructuring associated with this).</p> <p>As the majority of the Council's staff are employed on national terms and conditions, the Council has to operate within the relevant statutory and national guidance in calculating redundancy payments. The relevant national guidance is contained in "The Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006".</p> <p>The Council has set aside £1.5m as part of its budget plans for redundancy costs for next year. The actual amount of this spent will depend on the proposals that come forward.</p> <p>Mr Peter Ward asked the following supplementary question:</p> <p>That's over £5m on redundancy and I hope you give those people being made redundant as much thought as you gave the Senior Officer earlier on this evening, people who are losing their jobs. How much, if any, of these payments go towards non-disclosure clauses? A gagging order, an agreement not to tell the press how much they have got.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Resources responded:</p> <p>I don't think I can tell Mr Ward exactly what the figure is this evening, but I am happy to</p> |

look into that and come back to him. One thing I would say is that it's impossible to make savings without reducing staff numbers. Whilst other Councils have announced very large impacts on their staff, I think here in Peterborough through the efforts of the Trade Unions, Peterborough City Council and employees we have to date managed to avoid 167 compulsory redundancies and we will continue to do all we can to reduce any compulsory redundancies amongst the remaining 74 jobs that are still at risk and this will include consideration of voluntary redundancy applications from staff who are awaiting outcome of their application for the first announcement and also employees who have requested voluntary redundancy following our second announcement. And one final point, yesterday I met three staff who had left the Council and their ages ranged from 18 to 40. The 18 year old had been with us for 6 months, I really regretted the fact that she had to leave us after just 6 months in her first job, but all were in new jobs, so I really wish every employee well, whether it's Mike Heath here or it's anyone who leaves. There are opportunities out there.