

Council Meeting – 7th October 2020

Written Answers Provided To Public Questions Asked At The Meeting

1. Question from Kurtis Crossland to Councillor Paul Wood (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety)

Public Question Concerning Cleaning in Flats

Q. Kurtis Crossland asked what the cleaning schedule was for communal areas in Council properties such as stairwells in flats; had this been increased due to Coronavirus; when was the last time the flats on Halfway Gardens were cleaned and could it be confirmed that there would be proactive cleaning of areas in properties?

A. The following answer was provided in writing to Mr. Crossland:

Dear Kurtis

Please accept my apologies for not being able to attend the Council Meeting on Wednesday, 7th October.

Below is the answer to your questions: -

Communal areas of small blocks of flats are cleaned on a 13 week cycle and if there is an issue we will pick this up on a responsive basis. We have displayed posters in communal areas giving advice to tenants about maintaining social distancing whilst in the communal areas and trying to avoid touching handrails etc, and also washing their hands when they get into their homes, in line with public health guidance. We have employed additional staff to ensure the communal areas are cleaned on a regular basis. Communal areas on Halfway Gardens were cleaned approximately 12 weeks ago and are due to be cleaned next week.

Kindest regards,

Councillor Paul Wood
Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety

2. Questions from Sophie Thornton to Councillor Paul Wood (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety)

Public Questions Concerning issues in Lowedges, Batemoor and Jordanthorpe

Q. Sophie Thornton asked questions concerning several issues in the areas of Lowedges, Batemoor and Jordanthorpe.

First, she asked when the Council would clear fly-tipping which had been left in empty garages behind 51 Gervase Avenue, Lowedges and when unsafe structure garages due for demolition on Lowedges Place would be taken down?

Secondly, she asked, what the schedule was for when a council property window was broken; and how long did it take from boarding-up the window to fixing it? She said that in Lowedges, Batemoor and Jordanthorpe, there were many windows which were waiting to be fixed months after being reported. She asked whether the Council would address the properties that had windows boarded up, cutting off natural light and affecting residents' mental health, as a matter of priority.

Thirdly, Sophie Thornton asked a question as to the average time for the Council's housing repairs service to resolve fire safety repairs and how many had not been resolved within 30 days?

A. The following answers were provided in writing to Ms. Thornton:

Dear Sophie

Please accept my apologies for not being able to attend the Council Meeting on Wednesday, 7th October.

Below are the answers to your questions: -

Q. There are multiple issues across Lowedges relating to empty garages. Examples include:

The garages behind 51 Gervase Avenue, Lowedges, have been left filled with fly tipping for months. When will the Council clear this?

A. The local Estate Services team are aware of the issues relating to fly tipping on this garage site and have put measures in place previously to try and stop fly tipping by erecting a barrier to the entrance. This has helped reduce fly tipping, particularly commercial-building waste, however fly tipping still continues, the site is in a secluded location and unlit. Regular checks of all garage sites across the area are made and they remove fly tipping and report repairs where needed. Estate Officers have been on site 6th October and established that the doors to some of the garages have been pulled open as it appears there has been further attempts to dump building waste. An order has been placed to re secure

these doors. Rubbish from around the site and the electrical substation will be cleared by Wednesday 7th October.

The rubbish inside the garages will remain inside the garages until the site is demolished. The Estates team will continue to monitor the site until the garages are demolished.

Q. When will the unsafe structure garages due for demolition on Lowedges Place be taken down?

A. The demolition contract was awarded to MHH Contracting with a view to starting on site late September 2020. There has been a slight delay to this work starting on site due to asbestos specific investigations. Once these investigations are completed, it is anticipated that site operations will recommence by the end of October.

The outhouses at Lowedges Place (currently fenced off) and other garage sites in the Lowedges area, included in this contract, have been prioritised in the contractor's programme of works so will commence early in the programme.

There are no unstable or dangerous structures within these sites. A number of garage sites and outhouses have been secured/ fenced off for public safety reasons. These are inspected and checked regularly. These sites are also programmed into the demolition contract as a priority.

Q. What is the schedule for when a council property window is broken? How long does it take from boarding-up the window to fixing it? Across Lowedges, Batemoor and Jordanthorpe, there are many windows which are waiting to be fixed months after being reported. Will the Council address the properties who have had their windows boarded up, cutting off their natural light and thereby impacting their resident's mental health, for over 6 months across the area as a matter of priority?

A. We respond and board up broken windows within 24hrs. Once boarded an appointment is made with the tenant and at the tenants convenience a Glazier attends to measure and schedule to replace the glass, again at the tenants convenience. We have been experiencing access issues and also have a back log due to COVID restrictions. We have started to take a more pragmatic approach by batching Glazing jobs by estate and we are making progress in working through the backlog.

Q. What is the average time for the Council's housing repairs service to resolve fire safety repairs? How many have not been resolved within 30 days?

A. The average time to resolve fire safety repairs is currently 53.5 days. The average is impacted by lead times for availability of accredited

contractors, specification of materials and access issues. The Repairs Service have recently gained Accredited status and are building a team and processes to improve our response to completing fire safety works. 1,315 fire safety jobs have not been resolved within 30 days.

Kindest regards,

Councillor Paul Wood
Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety

3. Questions from Nigel Slack to Councillor Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member for Children and Families) and lead Member for Public Health

Public Questions Concerning Coronavirus, Universities and Young People

- Q. Nigel Slack referred to work by universities in the USA in relation to the idea of 'superspreaders' of Covid19 and to evidence that those most likely to be superspreaders were children and young adults.

He stated that the Government, the City and both Universities had failed the residents by following economic based government guidelines, despite warnings that the return to school and university was not safe. He said it was also clear that the measures put in place prior to students returning had been insufficient and the number of outbreaks in schools and universities continued to rise and affected the rate of infection in the city and its more vulnerable population.

He said that the local rate appeared to be in excess of 280 per 100,000 population and commented on the number of cases at the universities.

Mr Slack also commented upon the role of Universities and accommodation providers as being complicit in this situation, and also the media and others in making young people believe they were invulnerable to the pandemic. He referred to the effect of the lockdown on the mental health of young people and to the potential effect on them if they believed they were responsible for the death of a family member.

He asked the following questions:-

1. Would the Council demand an apology from the universities for putting money before student safety?
2. Would the Council demand accommodation providers ensure student safety was prioritised and support for those in lockdown delivered at their own cost?

3. Would the Council reconsider the advice received from the government about the safety of continued school attendance, in light of the latest scientific evidence, and move quickly to mitigate the impact on pupils, teachers and the wider community?
4. How would the Council respond to the latest report from the US Centre for Disease Control that the virus appeared to be transmittable through aerosol spray spread in the air?

A. Councillor Jackie Drayton, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families and the lead Member for Public Health, responded to the questions. She thanked Mr Slack for his questions and said that people were all very concerned about what was happening in relation to the Coronavirus pandemic and she said that the points he had raised were very important. She explained that the Director of Public Health was to provide an update in relation to Coronavirus to the Council at this meeting.

She said that decisions were made nationally about children going back to school and also in relation to students going to university and businesses being open. The Council wanted to keep everybody as safe as possible and keep the most vulnerable safe. It also wanted to make sure that the City and businesses and economy were open and to make sure they could keep going.

Councillor Drayton said that she would provide a written answer in relation to Mr Slack's questions and she said the points he had raised were very valid and there was some big thinking to do going forward.

The written answer is below:

Dear Mr Slack

Thank you for the questions you brought to full Council on 7th October 2020, I'm so sorry for the delay but as promised here are my written response.

Q1 Recent work by several US universities and Indian States has, in the largest study of it's kind (looking at nearly 600K people including 85K infected people) shown that the idea of 'superspreaders' of Covid19 is clearly evidenced and that the people most likely to be 'superspreaders' are children and young adults.

<https://www.princeton.edu/news/2020/09/30/largest-covid-19-contact-tracing-study-date-finds-children-key-spread-evidence>

A1 I have asked the director of Public Health, Greg Fell to answer this question

From Greg Fell

'The notion of 'superspreaders' is well established. Although it is difficult to definitively demonstrate one way or the other there is an established body of evidence that most secondary transmission events come from a small number of people (the counter proposition being that this is not the case and there is a mean number of secondary contacts per case and variability around this.)

The best summary I have recently seen on what we know about spread is in this thread <https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1308080056384843777.html>

There is not an established body of science to suggest that children and young people are any more 'superspreaders' than anyone else. My read of the view of SAGE is that the opposite is the case, children are less likely to be infected and less likely to be (asymptomatic or symptomatic) spreaders (super or not). I would have to go back and trawl through the SAGE stuff to check that in order to be absolutely sure, but that is my read of it.

Finding a single article does not constitute a body of science.

The notion of children being 'superspreaders' in flu is established, hence why we vaccinate. For reasons I don't understand (I will try to find out) the same concept doesn't apply here, may be less susceptible to infection in the first place (see the Muge Cevic thread above?)'

Q2 Our Government, this City and both Universities have failed the city's residents by following economic based HMG guidelines, despite warnings from educators that the return to school and University was not safe. It is also clear that the measures put in place prior to students returning have been insufficient, the number of outbreaks in schools and universities continue to rise and threaten to dramatically impact on the rate of infection in the city and it's more vulnerable population.

Our local rate appears to be in excess of 100/100K where we should, by rights, be entering a local lockdown and deaths are now rising again.

Bojo has attempted to blame the public for this second wave but, Universities desperate for their fees and accommodation providers desperate for their profits have been complicit in this situation, and the media and others have created a cadre of young people schooled over the last 6 months to believe they are invulnerable to this pandemic.

A2 Both Universities have done huge amounts to prepare for students returning. Our PH Team have been working closely with the Universities and have been aware of those preparations. The plans have been thorough and meticulous and have included covid-19 safety, welfare support and different study options.

There has been a significant rise of cases in both student populations, with active circulation of the virus. This simply reflects situation for 18-30 year old's everywhere, (fastest growing positive age cohort by far), and isn't something inherent in "students". It isn't right just to "blame

students” or to ‘blame’ anyone for the rise, as it is more about the general rise in that age group and others.

So in Sheffield (and everywhere else in Northern England) we have seen a significant rise in all cases in the general population. If we then superimpose a significant University based set of cases on this, as 60.000 + students come into the City it rises higher. This is an issue for Sheffield and all the University Towns and Cities in the North. In Sheffield, every year we have thousands of students who come to study in our City. I firmly believe that whilst they are here, they are our young people, and it’s important that those young people feel at home here, safe, secure and welcome. It’s important too that parents/carers and families feel that their children who attend Universities in Sheffield are safe here too.

Q3 We hear about the damage being done to youngsters mental health by the lockdown but how much more will they be damaged if they believe they are responsible for the death of a family member?

A3 I have to say, Mr Slack, although I totally understand how passionate you are about interrogating the Council, and other organisations, that I find your language in these questions, especially when talking about Students and Young people ‘being responsible for the death of a family member’, and stating that ‘the Universities and Accommodation providers are putting money before student safety’, is emotive and divisive. Children’s, young people’s and adult’s mental health are really important to me, that’s one of the reasons I supported all children and young people going back to school and university. We are all living through challenging times and many people are feeling anxious and worried about members of the family staying safe. I believe people across our City, including the Council, Universities and Schools are working extremely hard under very difficult circumstances.

Q4 Will this Council demand an apology from the universities for putting money before student safety?

A4 I believe that the Universities have, and are, doing all they can to protect, support and ensure their students continue their education in a safe and secure environment and definitely are not putting money before student safety.

Q5 Will this Council demand accommodation providers ensure student safety is prioritised and support for those in lockdown delivered at their own cost?

A5 We will continue to work with accommodation providers to ensure student safety is prioritised and as stated above both Universities are providing support for Students who have to self-isolate or are shielding.

Q6 Will this Council reconsider the advice received from HMG about the safety of continued school attendance, in light of the latest scientific

evidence, and move quickly to mitigate the impact on pupils, teachers and the wider community?

A6 We will continue to work with all schools across the City to ensure the children and young people in Sheffield are able to continue their education in safe and secure environment. I strongly believe we must, if possible, keep educational opportunities open to ensure that the existing education inequalities in our City are not widened.

In response to your further public health related question asked at the meeting:

Q How would the Council respond to the latest report from the US Centre for Disease Control that the virus appeared to be transmittable through aerosol spray spread in the air?

A Aerosol transmission has always been a potential route for infection with COVID. We are learning more about this as evidence on COVID continues to increase.

The UK advisory group SAGE (the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies) have considered evidence on aerosol transmission of SARS-CoV-2. During the coronavirus pandemic, the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) and the Environmental and Modelling Group (EMG) provided advice to SAGE on this matter.

SAGE EMG and NERVTAG have published a paper on aerosol transmission which includes comments on ventilation <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nervtagemg-role-of-aerosol-transmission-in-covid-19-22-july-2020>

There's also a more recent SAGE EMG paper on ventilation and COVID-19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emg-role-of-ventilation-in-controlling-sars-cov-2-transmission-30-september-2020>

In summary, there is recognition of the role of aerosol transmission as a potential route for infection, and we will follow government advice about minimising this risk, as and when it is published.

I do hope that you find this information useful and feel reassured that Sheffield is playing a proactive role and working with other partners across the city to keep all Citizens of, and visitors to, Sheffield as safe as possible in these uncertain times.

Take care and stay safe

All good wishes

Jackie

Jackie Drayton
Councillor for Burngreave Ward
Cabinet member for Children, Young People and Families Health and Social Care, including Safeguarding, Youth Justice, and Early Years, and
All age Disability Services, Poverty and Public Health
Lead Member for Children's Services
Sheffield Baby Safe Champion
Pronoun : her / she

4. Question from Nigel Slack to Councillor Mazher Iqbal (Cabinet Member for Business and Investment)

Public Questions Concerning Coronavirus and the Economy

Q. Nigel Slack commented upon the impact of Covid19 on the economy and to a recent announcement of the likely closing of cinemas around the country, which was of concern as it suggested the footfall for retailers and cultural venues was very significantly below previous levels.

He commented that businesses were using the pandemic as an excuse to restructure their businesses and to shed employees or locations and which may become prevalent as the furlough scheme ended. He said that whilst neo-liberal economics might demand that this was the right thing to do, it was not however the moral thing to do in the midst of an international crisis.

Mr Slack asked if the Council would therefore review its economic plan for the city, to dial back the chase for big corporate names that may come to Sheffield if enough incentives were offered but might withdraw when the situation became tough?

A. The following answer was provided in writing to Mr. Slack:

Dear Mr Slack

Thank you for submitting your written question, I am responding to say that it is not accurate to characterise recent inward investment activity as "chasing big corporate names that may come to Sheffield if we offer enough incentives". There have been some big corporate names locating to Sheffield in recent years, but we believe these are in key sectors, embedded in local supply chains and labour markets. Inward investment will always play an important part of a balanced economic strategy, but only a part. Supporting indigenous start ups, scale ups and business survival will always generate far more local economic impact than inward investment alone. Incentives have always been used very sparingly for the very reason the question suggests.

The intention is to review the city's economic strategy. We all know Covid has exposed deep inequalities in our city and must give us a

renewed conviction to address the root causes. We intend to reform the previous 'City Growth Board' and work to develop a refreshed economic strategy.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

Councillor Mazher Iqbal
Cabinet Member for Business and Investment

5. Questions from Graham Wroe to Councillor Mazher Iqbal (Cabinet Member for Business and Investment)

Public Question Concerning Proposals for New Road from Park Square to Granville Square

- Q. Graham Wroe made reference to the Draft Development Framework, within which there were plans to build a new dual carriageway from Park Square to Granville Square, behind the station through Sheaf Valley Park. He commented upon the potential effect of the proposal, including in relation to noise and air pollution, the effect on walking routes, the loss of green space and in respect of the Amphitheatre. He said that a petition concerning the proposal was recently launched.

He stated that a Council serious about the climate emergency would not be considering such a proposal and in relation to a need for improvements to the public transport system to encourage drivers not to use their cars.

Mr Wroe asked the following questions:-

1. What alternative plans were being considered?
2. Where could these plans be viewed?
3. How could citizens influence this decision?
4. Please, give a commitment not to build a new dual carriageway today.

- A. The following answer was provided in writing to Mr. Wroe:

Dear Mr Wroe

Thank you for submitting your written question.

In relation to the status of the Midland Station Development Framework, this is very much at concept stage, including the potential to bring the tram closer to the city centre at the front of the station where the Inner Ring Road currently is and moving the Inner Ring Road to the east of the station. At this early stage there is no final scheme proposal.

As the elements contained with the Development Framework are taken forward, they would be subject to a significant options appraisal as part of the development of any business case. At the appropriate stages much more detailed public consultation, as well as a full Environmental Impact Assessment and a number of other associated technical reports and investigations will be undertaken. This process will determine the preferred option for the station masterplan developments and supporting infrastructure which we will then seek to confirm delivery status.

The proposals in the Midland Station Development Framework are only one part of the city's approach to creating the right conditions for future public transport and our Transport Strategy endorsed in Summer 2019 and the City Region Transport Strategy sets these out.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

Councillor Mazher Iqbal
Cabinet Member for Business & Investment