

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS
Council Meeting – 29 September 2022

Question: 1.
From: Councillor P Fielding
Response by: Councillor Frost – Cabinet Spokesperson for Growth and Sustainability- Regeneration and Culture

Question:

What steps is the Council taking to replace the Council houses lost in the recent fires on Woodland Drive?

Response:

Thank you, Cllr Fielding, for your question.

There have been no decisions regarding replacing the council houses lost on the Woodlands Drive site.

For the time being, we'll be grassing and fencing off the site.

We want to consult and engage the local community in decisions relating to the site's future use.

Thank you.

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Question: 2.
From: Councillor Crisp
Response by: Councillor Gardiner – Cabinet Spokesperson Core Services

Question:

Given the inevitable cost pressures that the council must be suffering, how will the council balance this year's budget?

Response:

Thank you, Cllr Crisp, for your question.

Like many people, organisations, and businesses up and down the country, the council is facing unprecedented financial challenges.

As reported through our quarter one performance update, the current forecast is for a cost pressure of 13 million pounds this financial year.

Although the vast majority is a consequence of things outside the council's control, members will recall that these emerging risks were flagged and already within our contemplation when setting this year's budget.

Therefore, monies had already been set aside to mitigate the anticipated impact. With the introduction of a formal moratorium on spend and the development of action plans to address specific areas of concern, the council will balance its budget this financial year.

The medium-term and macroeconomic impact of the ongoing global situation is of more concern. Despite this difficult and uncertain outlook, work continues to develop a transformational activity programme to mitigate anticipated budget pressures in future years.

Thank you.

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Question: 3.

From: Councillor Kitching

Response by: Councillor Frost – Cabinet Spokesperson for Growth and Sustainability- Regeneration and Culture

Question:

The new Conservative Prime Minister, Liz Truss, has clearly indicated her intention to reverse the laws banning fracking, despite ongoing concerns about the risks associated with this practice.

Under the new legislation, would Barnsley Council pursue licences for fracking operations on its own land?

Response:

No.

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Question: 4.

From: Councillor W Fielding

Response by: Councillor T. Cave – Cabinet Spokesperson Children's Services

Question:

We were all shocked and disappointed to read the news in the Chronicle about the children's home that has received another inadequate OFSTED rating.

Could the Cabinet Member please give his perspective on how this happened and what steps are now being put into place to both improve the situation and to stop this from happening again? In giving his answer could the Cabinet Member please detail when he expects the restriction of accommodation to be lifted so that further vulnerable children can be safely accommodated in this setting?

Response:

Thank you, Cllr Fielding, for your question.

As a corporate parent of all our looked-after children and young people, I'd like to assure people that the safety of young people in our care is our highest priority.

During and following the Ofsted inspection, we implemented a robust action plan to track and achieve the changes needed, and Ofsted has received regular updates on our progress.

The action plan details the findings from the inspection and other areas for development. The key areas are as follows:

- We have a new residential home manager, bringing the appropriate challenge that is needed.
- We have analysed the matching of the young people in the home, supporting us in considering their future care plans.
- We have identified training opportunities for all employees so we can be confident they have the skills and experience to care for our young people and keep them safe. We are also creating a learning and development framework specific to the needs of the young people that the home is registered to care for.
- Our employees have had guidance on how to respond to and record serious incidents. It is reassuring now that all incidents within the home are reported to the Head of Service for Children in Care.
- The Executive Director and Service Director of Children's Services and the council's HR service continue to meet monthly with all employees to encourage reflection and clarity regarding standards of practice.
- A council Internal Audit review of the home is underway.

- An audit tool has been created for the residential home manager, and additional audits are planned within the children's service audit framework. This will provide further scrutiny and will evidence robust management oversight.
- We have undertaken a full review of the young people's records, focusing on risk assessments, missing protocols and care plans. Senior managers are provided with copies to review when there are significant updates. This ensures a clear, robust, shared understanding of expectations in keeping our young people safe in the home and the community.
- We are also reviewing the overall staffing and management structure alongside a review of the home's statement of purpose, including the number of young people that the home accommodates in the future.

The framework for inspecting children's homes has very clear and set criteria.

At the time of the inspection, the home had had an interim residential home manager in post for too long. Permanent recruitment to registered managers' roles is very challenging. The regulators were unhappy that the position hadn't been filled, despite acknowledging all the efforts we had taken to appoint to this critical post.

The residential home manager is responsible for ensuring complete oversight of all policies, procedures and processes. Regular independent Regulation 44 inspection visits advised officers and members that safeguarding in the home was good when it clearly wasn't.

With a new permanent residential home manager and re-tendering of the Regulation 44 contract, we are making better progress.

We have also appointed a service manager to oversee progress in the home, and senior managers regularly visit.

A recent Ofsted compliance visit recognised the efforts and changes within the home, and I'm pleased to confirm that all compliance notices have now been lifted.

We expect a full two-day inspection before the end of October, and we are hopeful that our progress will be reflected in an improved judgement.

It's our priority that we assure ourselves that we are also in a position to place more young people in the home. The action and development plan is monitored weekly by the Executive Director and Service Director of Children's Services.

I continue to receive fortnightly briefings on progress, and there will also be regular progress reports taken to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Thank you.