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Friday, 22 December 2017

TO: THE MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS

Dear Councillor,

Please see attached responses to the questions raised under agenda item 6, detailed below, at the meeting of the **COUNCIL** held on **WEDNESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2017**.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kim Webber', written over a horizontal line.

Kim Webber
Chief Executive

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TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.2

1. Skelmersdale's Town Centre Improvements - Question raised by Councillor A Owens on behalf of local residents

"Please could the Council Leader or Portfolio Holder provide some dates for improvements to Skelmersdale's Town Centre? There seems to be continual improvements in Ormskirk but nothing yet visible in Skelmersdale."

Response

The regeneration scheme for Skelmersdale Town Centre was granted planning permission by the Council in 2015, but the decision was the subject of a series of legal challenges. Whilst the Council successfully defended these challenges, a significant amount of time was lost in the project and as a consequence it has been necessary to go back out to the retail/leisure market to ascertain the current level of commercial interest in the scheme. It has also been necessary to revisit assumptions regarding costings and income in relation to the proposed scheme, the delivery of which is subject to it being financially viable.

Whilst this is a time consuming exercise, the Council and its partners remain committed to delivering the town centre regeneration scheme in Skelmersdale and continue to devote significant effort and resources to the project. We are engaged in progressive discussions with a number of potential occupiers who have expressed an interest in coming to Skelmersdale.

2. Skelmersdale Town Council - Question raised by Councillor A Owens on behalf of local residents

"Please could the Council Leader explain why Skelmersdale has no Town Council or similar organisation to speak for it? With a population of about 40,000, as opposed to Ormskirk's 25,000, it does seem that the town is a poor relation."

Response

Skelmersdale is served by 16 Borough Councillors across 7 wards. The total electorate is 24,407, an average of 1525 per Councillor (December 2017 Electoral Register), as compared to Ormskirk with an average of 1586. This provides a strong level of councillor representation.

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 community governance reviews may be undertaken enabling the establishment of a town council.

One option is for local electors to petition their principal council for a community governance review to be undertaken. A petition must set out at least one recommendation that the petitioners want the review to consider making which can include the creation of a new town council. It must also be signed by the requisite percentage of electors (7.5%) before a governance review is triggered. Although a petition was launched in 2016 for a governance review with a view to the creation of a Skelmersdale Town Council this was not progressed and formally presented for the Council's consideration.

Town councils, like parish and community councils operate at a level below borough councils. They are elected and can help on a number of local issues, like providing:

- allotments
- public clocks
- bus shelters
- community centres
- play areas and play equipment
- grants to help local organisations
- consultation on neighbourhood planning

They also have the power to issue fixed penalty fines for things like:

- litter
- graffiti
- fly posting
- dog offences.

The above noted matters are administered by the borough council (or next higher tier of local authority) where no town council is in place and even where there is a town council a number of matters may remain with the next tier of local authority.

Town councils raise precepts as a result of providing services and associated costs, such as the administration of arrangements. Across Lancashire, Merseyside and Halton for a Band D property the average precept raised is around £50 per household in a town council area (the highest cost in the area mentioned is Knowsley with £107.89 – 2017/18 data). Precise averaging of cost is difficult to determine as it will depend amongst other things on the extent of functions exercised and numbers and values of property in the area of town councils.

3. One Hour Free Parking provision in Ormskirk - Question raised by Councillor A Owens on behalf of local residents

"Several medical practices are situated in Ormskirk Town Centre and when patients have a medical appointment they have to park their vehicle in one of the Town Centre car parks. This obviously incurs a cost, which a lot of people can ill afford. This doesn't happen in Skelmersdale, Burscough, Parbold, Up Holland and Aughton, so why should the patients in the Ormskirk medical practices have to pay? The car park used by the council is paid for by the rates of the local population through which council employees get a bonus by getting free parking,

while the people who pay for the car parks have an extra cost to attend for medical treatment. Would the Council Leader or Portfolio Holder agree to a time restriction of one hours free parking on Ormskirk Town Centre car parks as this should suffice as the medical practices rarely run late excessively?"

Response

Officers are currently reviewing the charging regime for the Councils car parks in Ormskirk. The review will be the subject of a report to Council in the New Year. It would not be appropriate to pre-empt the findings and recommendations of that review.

4. Car Parking Charges for Blue Badge Holders - Question raised by Councillor A Owens on behalf of local residents

"While accepting the need for wider spacing and for additional time, Blue Badge holders are not necessarily financially disadvantaged. Therefore, does the Council have any plans to introduce car parking charges for Blue Badge holders, in line with a number other council policies and the local hospital?"

Response

Officers are currently reviewing the charging regime for the Councils car parks in Ormskirk. The review will be the subject of a report to Council in the New Year. It would not be appropriate to pre-empt the findings and recommendations of that review.

5. Reporting of Damage to Footpaths - Question raised by Councillor A Owens on behalf of local residents

"Virgin Media are currently being allowed to leave damage they cause to footpaths unrepaired in the Borough. While Highways is a county council responsibility, how many fault reports, related to the poor Virgin Media reinstatement, have been raised to the county council by the Borough Council following observation of this poor work by Borough Council staff in the course of their work e.g. street cleansing teams since 1st August 2017?"

Response

Responsibility for footways lies with Lancashire County Council (LCC). As far as officers are aware no issues have been directly raised with management by the workforce to report to LCC. The Street Scene operation is not adversely affected by uneven pavements, they would need to be quite bad to prevent us cleaning them. The mechanical sweeper will clean most areas as it operates with brushes and suction, where this is not possible a manual sweep should take place. If there are any concerns about the cleanliness of specific footways this should be reported as patch problems so that they can be addressed.

