

COUNCIL MEETING – 21 JULY 2020

QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10

6-19 TO COUNCILLOR SWINDLEHURST, CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR STRUTTON (RECEIVED 20.01.20)

In regards to the promise that the purchase of 25 Windsor Road would be cost neutral, can you clarify what the impact has been of the additional costs of the following; the changes of use in St Martin's Place, the issues around Herschel Car Park, the organisational needs of SBC due to bringing Avarto in house and the continued infrastructure requirements to properly fit out the building.

Reply

A report on the Council's Localities Strategy is coming to Cabinet in March that will provide a full update on the Council's Community Hubs and public premises. It will contain specific details on the future use of St Martin's Place and the financial assumptions underpinning the purchase of 25 Windsor Road. Despite the changing circumstances you refer to (such as the in-sourcing of Arvato) we anticipate the report will demonstrate that the revenue and capital positions continue overall to be in line with the position set out in 2018.

Planned works to improve and repair Herschel Car Park are listed as a separate stand-alone item in the Council's capital programme; were not and are not associated with the purchase of 25 Windsor Road.

1-20 TO COUNCILLOR NAZIR, CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR WRIGHT (RECEIVED 06.07.20)

SBC has a long waiting list for council properties; there is a particular demand for three bedroom plus houses, however our available properties are not re-rented out quick enough. There are many residents wanting to downsize but a lack of sufficient information or support given to them prevents them doing so quickly. Can I have some detailed information on how many properties are still in voids and how many residents are still waiting to downsize since January 2020?

Reply

There are currently (as of 16/07/20) 23 under-occupiers in council accommodation and we have successful rehoused 15 under-occupiers in the last financial year. There are currently 70 voids (as of 08/07/20) at various stages of the system, with 67% of these being 1 bedroom or studio properties. The average turnaround time is 90 days – although this timeframe has been affected by the COVID pandemic.

A recent advert placed for the Slough Labour Group advertised an intern role working for the MP.

The role was advertised at £15,990. Which is below the agreed Labour and council policy. The motion was as follows;

A Fully Funded Proper Pay Rise for Local Government Workers.

“This Council recognises our workers are public service super heroes and acknowledges that government funding has been cut to such an extent that a proper pay rise would result in a reduction in services and therefore resolves to; Write to the Secretary of State to call for a pay increase for local government workers to be fully funded with new money from central government; Back the campaign for a £10 per hour minimum wage; Encourage all local government workers to join a union Encourage local business to pay their staff a minimum of £10 per hour.”

The motion was put to the vote and carried with 35 votes For, 1 Against and 4 Abstentions.

Resolved – This Council recognises our workers are public service super heroes and acknowledges that government funding has been cut to such an extent that a proper pay rise would result in a reduction in services and therefore resolves to;

- Write to the Secretary of State to call for a pay increase for local government workers to be fully funded with new money from central government;
- Back the campaign for a £10 per hour minimum wage;
- Encourage all local government workers to join a union
- Encourage local business to pay their staff a minimum of £10 per hour.

Can the leader of the council please explain why the town’s MP directly employing people at under the hourly £10 per hour rate that his own party and town council voted to encourage back in January 2020?

Reply

You are correct, Slough Labour Group passed the above motion in January 2020, unfortunately it was not passed unanimously as 25% of the Conservative Group voted against this motion and refused to back the campaign for a £10 an hour minimum wage.

Unfortunately your question fails to stand up to scrutiny after this. You are incorrect to state “the Slough Labour Group advertised an intern role working for the MP.” Slough Labour Group has never placed such advert and never will recruit to the

MP's office. As I thought an elected councillor would be aware MP's staff neither fall under the remit of the local authority in the area in which they are employed nor by the party of the areas elected MP. We in the Slough Labour Group would be grateful if you could correct the record on this.

As you are not a constituent in Slough and therefore unable to seek help from Slough's MP I have taken the liberty to write to him on your behalf and he has provided me with the following response;

"My staff are public service super heroes, especially during this pandemic when my team have worked tirelessly and largely unrecognised to help hundreds of local people in challenging circumstances. This has only been made harder by the clear impact that years of Conservative Government cuts are having on local services and support. As the Council will be aware, staffing budgets for MPs and their staff are set by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), as are the pay bands for each role. While I may personally consider these to be too low, I have no power to change them and must adhere to them.

In hiring any member of staff I am required to pay them a salary that falls within the IPSA salary band for that role, while ensuring I do not exceed my overall staffing budget. In addition to salaries, my staffing budget must cover employer NI contributions and a 10% non-contributory pension scheme for all my staff. I currently have the ability within my budget to hire a casework-focused intern for a period of 6 months, at the National Minimum Wage (NMW). This trainee-level internship, which is in high demand, will allow a person to gain valuable career experience and training, while giving more local people the timely and essential support they need at this challenging moment. As I cannot exceed my staffing budget, the likely alternative would be to not recruit for this role, depriving someone of a paid job that many ask me if they can do for free, and depriving local people of much-needed support. Therefore on balance, recruiting for this position seems like the right thing to do.

I fully support the Council's motion of January 2020, especially around the introduction of a £10 NMW, which if implemented would mean IPSA increasing the salary band for this role and associated staffing budgets. I am hugely disappointed that the Conservative Government have not taken steps to increase the NMW, and have continued with their decade-long programme of austerity for local authorities, depriving Slough Borough Council of the funding it needs in order to achieve its ambitions for our great town. I fully encourage organisations to pay their staff at least £10 per hour, especially where they can take steps to increase their revenues to do so, but unlike local authorities and businesses who can alter their revenue through tax and price changes, this is not something MPs can do. To ensure MPs only ever recruited jobs paying at least £10 per hour would require IPSA to change their salary bands and budgets, and for IPSA to make that change would require the Conservative Government to increase the NMW, which they have sadly chosen not to do."