

COUNCIL – 27TH JULY 2023

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Received from Councillor Instone to the Leader of the Council

“Will the Leader re-commit to the principles passed by him in the Jan motion this year regarding female participation in public life and explain why he has not sought to nominate any females on any of the main council committees dealing with improvement, namely the Corporate and Improvement Scrutiny & Audit and Corporate Governance?”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Instone for your question. I would like to begin by stating that I am incredibly proud of my Conservative team of Councillor's; all of whom have the energy and drive to deliver at pace the change which Slough needs to see, to rectify the substantial issues left behind by the previous administration. The Conservative Group are committed to ensuring that we increase female participation in public life- and we also want to see greater participation from the various communities within Slough.

If I may pay tribute to the Labour Group for electing a female Group Leader for the first time- 11 years after the Conservative Group first elected a female Group Leader in Slough. I am very proud of the contribution which our female Councillor's make to our Group, and to our town. Councillor's Bedi and Wright have been first class additions to the Cabinet. Councillor Shah has been appointed as the Chair of the Licensing Committee. Councillor Dauti has brought a wealth of experience relating to children, bringing a new perspective to the challenges Slough families are facing. I look forward to their continued positive contributions to the Council, and in their determination to clean up the mess left behind by the previous administration.

Received from Councillor Escott to the Leader of the Council

“Can the Leader please explain why he has removed the Local Plan and Place Strategy responsibilities away from the Cabinet Portfolio of Planning and were there concerns communicated to Cllr Smith about keeping it within the Planning portfolio?”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Escott for your question. To simply answer your question- no, I did not receive any concerns communicated to me regarding the Local Plan and Place Strategy and it's place within the Planning portfolio.

I would like to thank Councillor Escott for giving me the opportunity to outline why I have had to take this decision. Under Labour there has been years of stagnation and decline, stale ideas and a lack of energy to push forward important changes which would have benefitted the residents of Slough. We need joined up-thinking to pursue bold objectives which will improve the lives of the people of Slough.

We need a Local Plan and Place Strategy which reflects the housing needs of the town; which understands the existing issues we are facing in terms of overcrowding and Temporary Accommodation and will better link up with our efforts

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to outline why I have had to take this decision- namely, to begin to turn the tide against Labour's decades of stagnation and decline. We need a Local Plan and Place Strategy which joins up with housing, with our efforts to improve air quality in the Borough and to improve healthy outcomes for Slough residents. I see all of these as intrinsically interconnected.

The status quo is not good enough. Slough has the largest average household size in England and Wales at 3 people per household; the England average being 2.4. Under Labour, there has been an increase of 49% in the number of households with 7 people and an increase of 92% in the number of households with 8 or more people. That makes a total of 2,078 households consisting of 7 or more people. In Slough 15.8% of our households are overcrowded- the England average being 4.3%. What did the previous Labour administration do to tackle this? Nothing.

It would seem that the previous Labour administration were indifferent to this impending issue. Slough also has a rising number of homeless households and people living in Temporary Accommodation. What did the previous Labour administration do to tackle this? Nothing. Another example of the previous administration being asleep at the wheel, without the energy and drive to bring positive change.

I am pleased that I have a Cabinet in place committed to right the wrongs of the past, and to deliver the positive change which our residents want to see. To do this, we need to be creative and imaginative in our problem solving. By placing the Local Plan and Place Strategy into Cllr Bedi's portfolio we can have one centralised basis from which we can ensure joined up thinking and strategic decision making which benefits the residents of Slough in the long run.

Received from Councillor Mann to the Lead Member for Leisure, Community Cohesion, Regulation, Enforcement & Planning.

"Given the recent disturbing news about the potential collapse of Thames Water, and the resultant impact this may have on thousands of Slough residents, can he please detail what steps he has taken to write to, meet or discuss the potential impact of such closures on Slough residents. Further, under the emergency planning responsibilities within his portfolio, what steps has he undertaken to ensure emergency supplies of fresh water as we have seen required in authorities elsewhere in the country?"

Reply

Thank you Councillor Mann for your question. There has as of yet been no conversations regarding the potential collapse of Thames Water. However, in the unlikely event that this should become a reality than Slough's Emergency Planning Department would follow the normal protocols in responding to water outages.

If the situation exceeds the capability and capacity of Slough's response, then a Partner Activation Teleconference (PAT) would be held to get a Sub-Regional Berkshire Local Authority Emergency Planning Group (BLAPG) response. If this

response also if due to the magnitude surpasses this capability then another Partner Activation Teleconference (PAT) would occur which would activate the Regional response through the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF).

It is important to note that if any talks were held in this regard that may cause concern and escalate the situation.

Received from Councillor Akram to the Lead Member for Leisure, Community Cohesion, Regulation, Enforcement & Planning.

“Since being appointed to his role, what steps has he taken to meet with the developers of the town centre?”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Akram for your question. I can confirm that alongside the Leader of the Council, a meeting has been requested with the owners of the Observatory and Queensmere centres and surrounding land once they have completed their reviews of how to take the project forward.

Received from Councillor Hulme to the Lead Member for Leisure, Community Cohesion, Regulation, Enforcement & Planning.

“How much money is generated by the Landlord Licensing Scheme and how do you propose to use that funding to improve the quality of the privately rented sector in Slough, many of whom are taken for abject advantage by unscrupulous and dodgy landlords.”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Hulme for your question. The Landlord Licensing Scheme covers parts of Chalvey and Central Ward. Landlords pay a fee in return for a 5 year licence and this pays for administration and management of the scheme and for compliance and regulatory checks. We have received a total of £1,581,828 of fees since the Landlord Licensing Scheme started in 2018 and £242,027.40 of this was carried forward to 2023/24. This will be augmented with additional fees collected during future months where licenses are renewed and new licences are issued.

Once a property is registered then we carry out compliance and regulatory checks on an ad-hoc basis including where we received information that there may be a non-compliance. Issuing licences and monitoring compliance is an important tool in sustaining the quality of private rented accommodation within the borough.

A licence is not granted until the council is satisfied that the property meets the criteria and the person managing the property is fit and proper. The Council’s policy sets out, clearly, how decisions are made and the tools available to ensure compliance.

The council has a number of options to identify houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) and rental properties with the designated licence area:

- Residents reporting a breakdown in landlord relationship and failure to respond to issues or living conditions.

- Officer led operations, which require door knocking in targeted areas and desk based research and letters to landlords.
- In some cases, estate agents inform landlords that they need to apply, and these applications are received and processed by officers.
- The team are also notified of new HMOs that are granted planning permission, with officers writing to the landlord informing them of the need to apply for a licence.

The process to ensure compliance varies according to risk levels and therefore, in some cases officers will carry out desk based compliance checks, visiting and carrying out checks when required. Where significant concerns are identified, a licence can be varied or revoked – these actions are guided by the council’s enforcement policy. Landlords can access information on the licence scheme and understand their legal obligations by either speaking to the team in Housing Regulation or by visiting our website - [Property licensing – Slough Borough Council](#).

Received from Councillor Anderson to the Lead Member for Leisure, Community Cohesion, Regulation, Enforcement & Planning.

“Can the Cabinet Member please detail his priorities for protecting and enhancing equalities across the town, particularly in relation to women and other marginalised groups over the coming year?”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Anderson for your question. As the Cabinet Member responsible for community cohesion, I am determined to enhance equalities across the town. In relation to your specific question regarding women, the council is currently funding specific projects and programmes, including providing a complex needs worker focused on the accommodation needs for victims of Domestic Abuse, supporting the running of refuge accommodation and programmes supporting children who witness Domestic Abuse. We will continue to do all we can to support the victims of Domestic Abuse, and we will work tirelessly to ensure that women and girls can feel safe in Slough. I have met with the Police and Crime Commissioner, and Thames Valley Police to outline the concerns of women and girls in Slough, and to ensure that we have a robust community safety plan in place.

Received from Councillor Gahir to the Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

“How many bus journeys have been taken in Slough over the last 12 months and what will you be doing over the summer to promote the £2 bus journey scheme?”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Gahir for your question. Data on the number of bus journeys in Slough is held by the Bus Operators but is not currently reported. The government’s £2 bus fare cap scheme started on 1 January 2023 and finishes on 31 October 2023. SBC are not a direct participant in the scheme but we are promoting it on our [buses](#)

web page, by way of a leaflet which has been used at a recent 'cost of living' event, and through social media (for example we retweeted this from the Department for Transport <https://twitter.com/transportgovuk/status/1626598526896713729?s=20>). We have also promoted it internally through Newsround and Weekly Member Briefing. We are working with Bus Operators, through our Enhanced Partnership, which I Chair, and through our Bus Service Improvement Plan, to encourage investment in public transport and to support the Councils transport and environment objectives.

Received from Councillor Matloob to the Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

"How many Slough children are living in temporary accommodation, both within the borough and outside of the borough and what steps are you taking to reduce that number?"

Reply

Thank you Councillor Matloob for your question. The number of families with children currently in Temporary Accommodation is 436. With regards to the steps which we are taking to reduce numbers:

We work according to Government guidelines to ensure that households with children are not placed in bed and breakfast/hotel accommodation for more than 6 consecutive weeks. We have limited social housing stock with a demand for social housing which far outweighs the supply therefore for homeless households we look to the privately rented sector to lower numbers in temporary accommodation.

The Temporary Accommodation Teams works in partnership with the Social Lettings Team to obtain alternative accommodation in the privately rented sector. The Housing Demand Team also work in partnership with the Social Lettings Team to prevent homelessness by securing accommodation in the privately rented sector prior to the allocation of temporary accommodation. Funding to secure tenancies is provided via DLUHC. It is likely however that we will require additional funding, in order to increase household moves into the privately rented sector due to the increase in homeless approaches, annual increases in rents, competition from neighbouring and London local authorities, landlord incentives as well as having to cover Local Housing Allowance Shortfalls. We are also restricted by households who are impacted by the Benefit Cap.

Received from Councillor Ajaib to the Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

“What is the number of children estimated to be living in overcrowded accommodation in the borough and what are you doing to reduce this number?”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Ajaib for your question. Regarding overcrowding applicants on the housing register, there is a high demand for social housing and lengthy waiting times, in particular for larger accommodation.

The Council offers an incentive for tenants in larger SBC properties to downsize to smaller accommodation and therefore free up larger accommodation for households on the housing register. However, downsizers are currently banded in Band B on the housing register. We would prefer an amendment to the Allocations Policy to give downsizers a Band A priority, in order to facilitate a quicker move. We would then advertise a more streamlined move (incentive included) for downsizers in our Housing Newsletter.

Social Housing tenants are able to register on the Homeswapper website which enables social housing tenants to swap to alternative social housing tenancies across the UK. A tenant is able to swap to another tenancy which has an additional bedroom e.g. tenants with a one bed tenancy can upscale to a 2 bed tenancy, 2 bed to a 3 bed etc.

Received from Councillor W.Sabah to the Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

“Given that the administration has publicly stated its agreement that you, and I quote, "cannot swerve our responsibilities to save money" and the change in bin collections will (and I quote again "bring Slough in line with the vast majority of authorities across the country who have fortnightly collections", what actions did the councillors take after being appointed in the role to direct the implementation and communication of the policy and is she content with the communications programme that she implemented?”

Reply

Thank you Councillor Sabah for your question. It is important to note that the decision to move to fortnightly bin-collections was made by the previous Labour administration. Given the scale of the financial challenges left behind by Labour, and the fact that the Council was so far below government targets relating to recycling the administration had no option but to implement the policy- and to ensure the roll-out was as robust as possible.

I would like to thank colleagues in communications for their work on the communications campaign. It was delivered across multiple channels, including out of home billboards in high footfall locations, targeted social media (across Facebook and Instagram) as well as digital radio advertising across the Borough. I won't go into the detailed performance metrics, but the digital campaign (which is the easiest to measure) performance significantly better than the industry average. The campaign started as an 'awareness' campaign to make residents aware of the change, and then moved to a 'traffic' campaign to drive residents to visit the websites to check their bin schedule and the 'binday' webpage has seen a significant increase in visits.

Received from Councillor Qaseem to the Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

“Will the Cabinet member please detail what meetings she has had since taking on her role with the Taxi and Hackney drivers federations and why has a major change of policy been implemented without the courtesy of even basic consultation with the workforce?”

Reply

I have not met with the Taxi and Hackney drivers federations. Changes to the policy relating to Taxi's and Hackney carriages are made either by the Licensing Committee or by Cabinet decision, depending on the nature of the change. The last policy change was in 2019. It may be that the Councillor is referring to the increase in fees and charges and if so these were set by the last administration as part of the 2023/24 budget.

As I say, there hasn't been a change in policy since 2019. We would consult with the Taxi Drivers Federation, the Taxi Drivers Association and the Private Hire Association and all licensed drivers irrespective of a federation or association where we can make a change to policy.