

COUNCIL – 25 JANUARY 2024

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Received from Councillor Gill to Leader of the Council

You have been in power for well over 6 months. You had originally stated that the fortnightly bin collections had experienced some teething problems but that was months ago and the significant increase in fly-tipping suggests otherwise. What is your administration doing to get this under control?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Gill for your question. The move to fortnightly collections has bedded down well, and recycling rates are increasing. By extending the range of plastics accepted we have made the service easier for residents to use. We will also be implementing a new food waste trial in the coming weeks. Fly tipping is an illegal activity linked in many cases to organised crime, and we are taking a robust approach to enforcement and will be seeking to use Proceeds of Crime Act to ensure perpetrators pay for the true cost of this activity, we will also be doing some publicity to encourage residents not to use unlicensed contractors to do house clearances etc. There is no evidence that fly tipping has increased since changes to the refuse collection and no link between the two.

Received from Councillor Carter to Leader of the Council

Will the leader be following the commissioner's advice and the instruction from the government to raise council tax?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Carter for your question. The Council awaits the decision from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in relation to Council Tax and Capitalisation for 2024/25. I am clear, however, that we will take the hard, but right choices to lead Slough to recovery.

Received from Councillor Gahir to Leader of the Council

Can the leader set out what steps he has taken to engage with the three parish councils in the town and ensure that elected parish members are effectively consulted with and governing in accordance the law and the Nolan principles of public life?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Gahir for your question. You will be aware that I am a member of Colnbrook Parish Council, so I am regularly engaged in that forum. I am happy to meet with the Chairs of parish councils if necessary. The Council already consults

with parish councils on some issues, and I am aware that the Monitoring Officer has reached out to parish councils in the borough. I would encourage such engagement to continue. I would remind you however, that as Leader, I do not have any legal right to instruct Parish Councils what to do, but I am happy to engage and consult in as constructive a way as possible.

Received from Councillor Mann to Leader of the Council

I refer to your written answer in July's full council in which you referred to "stagnation" "indifference" and "bringing energy and drive" to the issue of the Local Plan and compare it to your recent response that you are simply going to wait for the General Election and "keeping options open" as an excuse for the fact that no progress has been made on the Local Plan. Should residents take this as yet another example of your administration "being asleep at the wheel" to use your words, "without the energy and drive to bring positive change?" If not, please detail the progress made on the Local Plan and the budget that has been put in place for the 2024/25 financial year and the MTFS.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Mann for your question. Slough is fortunate in that it has an existing local plan in place with Saved Policies attracting significant weight in the decision making process and we are progressing work on building the evidence base for its ultimate replacement . Given that the system is changing and both major parties are suggesting they will make further changes to planning legislation should they win the forthcoming general election it is however unwise to rush to get a local plan approved under the current regulations even if this was possible. In light of the latest NPPF (December 2023) evidence base studies which can assist in the decision-making process in advance of a new Local Plan is being explored. It is worth pointing out that a Local planning authority can depart from its existing local plan where appropriate and an emerging local plan can be used to support planning decisions so the benefits of producing a plan which may be immediately rendered obsolete by a change in central government policy is limited.

Received from Councillor Matloob to Chair of Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

Can you please detail what training you are planning to undertake to support you in your new role and what steps you will take to ensure the committee operates in a non-partisan manner in line with best practise?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Matloob for your question. As a member and vice-chair of the committee since May 2023, I have benefitted from all the induction and training

arrangements which were provided by Democratic Services and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny over the past year, including specific scrutiny chairmanship training provided for myself and the previous chair. Now that I have become the Chair, I am pleased to have accepted a mentoring offer from the Local Government Association in which I get personal support and advice from an established scrutiny politician from another local authority. In addition to this, I intend to continue to develop my knowledge by attending further training, for example I'll be attending a 2-day leadership course in Warwick this weekend. Perhaps more importantly, I would like to ensure that the whole committee continues to learn and develop together, since we will provide a better scrutiny function for the authority if we are able to work together as an effective team and if we all continue to grow our understanding of our roles and of the council. I have asked Democratic Services to ensure that the ongoing programme of member development includes whole-committee scrutiny sessions, for this purpose. I'll continue to allow everyone to ask questions regardless of their political background. The committee has been pretty good at setting politics aside so far and some members of the committee have made it clear that they would like guests to the committee to be held to that same standard. I will continue to promote the value of the committee working in a collaborative, cross-party way and encourage members to scrutinise the executive to obtain best value for our residents.

Received from Councillor Mohammad to Chair of Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

Can the member please detail what outreach work he has undertaken with our many varied faith and community groups over the last quarter and how he has contributed to embedding community cohesion within our community?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Mohammed. In recent months I have undertaken visits to various community groups and organisations, and I am arranging a Slough Community Summit later in this year where the Council will bring together various faith and community groups to discuss the issues facing Slough residents, and the steps we can collectively take to deepen the partnership working which takes place with the Council.

Received from Councillor Dar to Lead Member for Highways, Housing and Transport

Can the member please provide information to all councillors about the extension of the street light dimming trial across the town and what conclusions that trial has drawn thus far?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Dar for your question. A review of street lighting has taken place to maximise energy efficiency, reduce light pollution and achieve lighting levels that provide on street visibility without negatively impacting residents. The trial has been very successful in that a reduction in energy use has been shown to have no negative effect on street visibility.

Received from Councillor Qaseem to Lead Member for the Environment, Environmental Services and Open Spaces

Following the recent impact of Storm Henk, and the potential for flooding across parts of the town, can the lead member please detail the contingency plans that are in place and how he has personally sought to reassure residents who may be concerned about the impact to their homes and livelihoods.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Qaseem for your question. Slough was the least effected of all the Berkshire boroughs by the recent flooding due to both the effective response of Council staff to rising flood water and good long-term planning and management of water courses and soak away areas. The last few months have seen unprecedented levels of rainfall, and ground water levels are some of the highest on record. We will remain vigilant over the winter months to deal with emerging problems. Longer term the implementation of the Sponge City project and further work with the Environment Agency will be required to respond to ongoing climate change and this will be a priority over coming years. The authority has an emergency flood plan, as part of its emergency planning response to a major incident, which details the strategic, tactical and operational response to an incident of this type.

Received from Councillor Hulme to Lead Member for Education and Children's Services

Can you please provide members with an update on children missing from education and the number of children of compulsory school age who are not registered as pupils at school, and are not receiving suitable education otherwise, (e.g., privately or in alternative provision).

Reply

Thank you Councillor Hulme for your question. In the academic year 2022/23 there were 723 children of compulsory school age who were not registered at a school and not known to be receiving suitable education otherwise. As per admissions regulatory protocol, we aim to have a school place allocated to a child within 10-15 days of an application being received.

Received from Councillor Ajaib to Lead Member for Highways, Housing and Transport

Can you please confirm how many families with young children are being placed in temporary accommodation in hotels and when we will be able to find more suitable for these families which would also be more cost effective for the council who need every pound it can save.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Ajaib for your question. We currently have a total of 27 households with children in hotel accommodation, which is being reduced by the actions taken.

Received from Councillor Instone to Lead Member for Highways, Housing and Transport

Can the member confirm how many families with young children have gone over the 6 weeks limit they can be housed in this type of hotel accommodation and confirm how many void properties the council currently has and why it is still taking so long to bring these to decent standard so they can be given to our residents who are waiting / being housed in temporary accommodation.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Instone for your question. There are six households with dependent children who have been in hotel accommodation for more than 6 weeks. These are all larger households, it is more difficult to procure self-contained temporary accommodation for larger households. We also face very stiff competition for accommodation from London Boroughs who are placing increasing numbers of families into Slough.

Received from Councillor Escott to Lead Member for Customer Service, Resident Engagement, Digital, Data and Technology

Can we have the customer contact centre performance KPI's for last 3 months and for member to confirm when the monthly performance figures will be back in the weekly members bulletin.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Escott for your question. We currently publish the weekly and rolling performance in the members bulletin. Please see below the customer contact centre performance KPI's for the last 3 months.

| Metric | Oct-23 | Nov-23 | Dec-23 | Total |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| # of Calls Received | 14,253 | 12,530 | 4,677 | 31,460 |
| # of Calls Answered | 10,135 | 8,511 | 3,970 | 22,616 |
| % of Calls Answered (KPI) | 71.1% | 67.9% | 84.9% | 71.9% |
| Average Response Time (KPI) | 0:09:01 | 0:08:39 | 0:07:21 | 0:08:37 |

Received from Councillor Nazir to Lead Member for Highways, Housing and Transport.

Why are single parent families being placed outside of the Borough for the temporary accommodation, when their children attend local schools and have local family support and some cannot drive either?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Nazir for your question. There are currently approximately 100 void properties. Following the successful implementation of the new housing IT system we are now nominating 15 – 20 properties per week and endeavouring to increase this figure. Most of the void properties are one bed properties and therefore would not be suitable for families with dependent children. We have seen a substantial increase in larger families, we do not have the available housing stock to accommodate larger households. We will be working on obtaining alternative accommodation for households in the privately rented sector. Our frontline homeless service is not a service to provide a Council property, it is to find alternative accommodation or prevent homelessness. With increasing homeless approaches, we cannot rely on our social housing stock we need to look increasingly to the privately rented sector. This will not only reduce numbers in temporary accommodation but also reduce the cost and overall management of temporary accommodation. We are implementing a visiting programme to all occupants in our temporary accommodation stock. This will conclude at the end of February and will possibly free up much needed stock if any are found in breach of their tenancy agreements.