

COUNCIL MEETING – 27 NOVEMBER 2018
QUESTIONS FROM ELECTOR UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 9

1. From Hamzah Ahmed to Councillor Strutton

“Given Councillor Wright’s previous comment, that cuts to education does not affect attainment- Is it fair for residents to assume that the Conservative group supports the £319 per pupil cut to education funding in Slough?”

Reply

Many thanks for your question.

I have had to make an assumption to where you are quoting from Cllr Anna Wright made the commitment as you did not quote it firstly.

I would like to point out the given the fact that it is widely accepted that Sloughs Schools pupils attainment rates are high and seem to be even improving that it could be argued that any said cuts have not had a real effect! But for me this has never been my view or that in general of my group! I have often raised my concerns about the attainment rates of the children actually resident in Slough as many go to school outside the town and about our more vulnerable children including SEND, those with disabilities.

The Department of Education has stated that school funding in England will rise to a record £43.5 billion by 2020 and that funding for pupils with additional needs has risen from £5 billion in 2013 to more than £6 billion this year. In Slough, the allocated 2018 -19 school budget is £149.2 million. We support the government’s decision to delay rolling out the national funding formula until 2021. In real terms this gives Slough Borough Council an extra year to set its own funding. The Conservative Group will be calling on the council to use this time fairly and transparently- allocating funding on the basis of schools’ and children’s actual needs, rather than simply on historic levels of funding.

Mr Ahmed, you have not quoted the source of Cllr Wright’s comments so unfortunately I’m not at liberty to provide a response on her behalf. However, I can confirm that on 31st January 2017, Cllr Wright voted in favour of a Labour Group Motion at Full Council(along with other members of the then Conservative Group at the time) which determined: -
That the Council opposes the governments planned cuts and any funding cuts to Slough’s schools and resolves to:

Write to the Secretary of State for Education to oppose these cuts and seek assurances that they will not adversely affect our children’s attainment;

· Write to our local MPs to ensure that the cuts facing our schools are raised in Parliament;

· Write to Slough’s schools to ensure they are prepared for the level of cuts they face and ascertain what support they require to continue to provide our children with an excellent education;

· Request the Education and Children’s Service Scrutiny Panel look into the cuts planned for Slough’s schools as a matter of urgency.

The Conservative Groups' stance on cuts to education funding in Slough is clearly evidenced in support of the above motion as Proposed by Cllr Hussain and seconded by Cllr Brooker as any cuts to education of our children would potentially have an effect in some way.

The £319 per pupil cut to education funding that you have quoted we understand was source from Radar – an automated news service set up by the PA (Press Association). This data is captured at a point in time and often differs to the end result.

The local funding formula for slough's schools is determined through consultation with schools followed by a formal decision of the Schools' Forum. There is no cut of any size proposed in the consultation.

I have spoken to Senior officers in the Finance Department and have been told unequivocally that rather than a reduction, in terms of the overall funding provided for schools next year by the DfE, Slough Borough Council has received more money and this will be fully allocated to schools in line with the consultation process. As yet, there is no proposal to cut funding to schools in Slough for 2019/20.

If you would like more financial information about education funding in Slough, you're most welcome to meet with Senior Officers and myself to go through the figures. I would be happy to arrange this meeting on your behalf.

2. From Peter Bodley to Councillor Swindlehurst

"How can you justify in the current climate of austerity, Frontline services and Home Care Services all struggling, spending nearly £35,000 under the flag of the Community Investment Fund on five parking bays in Cippenham Close? The work was imposed on the residents without any consultation which is against all recommendations in Local Government guidelines. This has caused a major impact on the residents, anger and stress on the loss of the grass verge which has been there for nearly fifty years."

Reply

Thank you for your question, I'll address its component parts individually.

Firstly, on the Council's budget position. In every year that his council has been Labour controlled we have always balanced our budget. We have had £80 million of conservative cuts passed onto us over the last decade and yet have still protected our frontline services. Our successful regeneration partnership has delivered nearly £5 million of development proceeds as a funding stream to ensure we have maintained, not cut services.

These funds have also enabled the Council to have a £1 million fund across the Borough for councillors to choose projects to deal with issues they identify in their neighbourhoods.

The budget for the Community Investment Fund was agreed at the Budget Setting council held on 22nd February 2018. It was agreed not only by the Labour Group – but also voted for by the entire Conservative Group who were present that night.

The guidelines for how the CIF operates were approved at the Cabinet meeting held on 18th March 2018. No opposition members asked to speak on the item and no objections were offered on the procedures as to how the CIF should be administered. Simply put, the CIF and how it operates received the full cross party support of the council.

As I have explained to you already in previous written correspondence, the works in Cippenham Close were carried out under the 1980 Highways Act and there is no duty upon the Council to consult formally with all residents under the Act. This applies for all highways schemes carried out under the CIF. So the claim made that the Council has failed to discharge its duties is not correct. The Council has discharged its duties as a public body in the appropriate and correct fashion, and in a fashion agreed on a cross party basis by councillors.

My party stood on a manifesto promise to 'install measures to protect green verges from over parking' in 2018. And here is one of the cards that Cllr Davis delivered on polling day to every resident who said they planned to support him. It also makes clear that if elected we were install measures to protect green verges from over parking.

Given that almost 70% of those residents who voted in Slough supported the local Labour Party platform and that 61% of those who voted in Cippenham Green supported Cllr Davis and the commitments on which he stood I am happy to justify honouring our manifesto pledges through the various neighbourhood schemes the Council has been delivering since May.

Finally, you mention the verge has been lost, as you can see from the picture behind you the vast majority of the verge has been retained and protected from parking incursions with a knee-rail. You will see from this photo that the formal parking capacity we provided as part of the measures to stop cars parking on the verge is being well used here even in the early afternoon.

On the three occasions I've visited the Close on my way home from work in the very early evening over the last week, 3 if not 4 of the bays have contained parked cars on every occasion.

3. From Lee Pettman to Councillor Swindlehurst

"The most recent guidance booklet for the Labour Party on becoming a councillor states that "one of the most important aspects of any Councillor's job is standing up for local residents." – does Councillor James Swindlehurst believe he and his fellow ward councillors are fulfilling this guidance when it comes to ensuring that local residents, such as those in Cippenham Close, have been properly consulted and represented before roadworks take place on their doorsteps?"

Reply

Thanks for your question

The Local Government Association text about a councillors role states that "every day councillors are expected to balance the needs of their local area, their residents and voters, with those of community groups, local businesses, their political parties and the Council."

It also states as a local councillor you are expected to know your patch and be aware of local problems. Cllrs Davis, Holledge and I had all observed cars parking on the green verge in Cippenham Close on various occasions while leafletting and canvassing in our area in the run up to the 2018 local election. And I think its entirely within the spirit of working to solve local problems that we nominated this verge as an area requiring a knee rail to stop cars parking over it.

As I have previously explained this evening, CIF highways works are carried out under the 1980 Highways Act and there is no duty upon the Council to consult formally with all residents under the Act.

Localgov.uk guidance about the role of a councillor states that “councillors have a complex role and must act in a number capacities. Councillors have to consider not just the interests of their local electorate but also of those throughout the whole area in their work to create a harmonious local environment.”

I am certainly happy to defend my work as a councillor in delivering the commitments that my party and elected colleagues made to residents during this years local election campaign, one of which was that we would take action to stop grass verges in our area being blighted by cars parking all over them.

4. From Steven Gillingwater to Councillor Strutton

“Can the Conservative Group Leader please tell what he has personally done to fight to protect Slough residents from the disastrous impact of Universal Credit?”

Reply

Thank you for your question on the Impact of the Universal Credit Steven. I am a supporter of the goals and principles behind the need to deliver Universal Credit but like many fellow Conservatives it is very clear that the way Universal Credit has been delivered by DWP. The aspects that are of greatest concerns and I am extremely disappointed with are as follows

1. My disappointment thus far with how it is being implemented.
2. How the funding for the implementation was cut in early stages
3. How the DWP were assessing claimants.

I along with the Conservative Group at the time supported this council in writing to the minister with our concerns as per the unanimous agreement in a very memorable Full Council Meeting on the 28th of September 2017. The reason why this meeting was so memorable as you may recall as was the one which The Labour Group pulled out of the Voter ID Pilot much to the disappointment of many Cllrs from both sides and especially the residents of Slough!

As you well know I have looked to provide support personal level to ward residents at times when possible. As well as through my work as a Cllr. I have raised my concerns in various meetings including a LGA organised Conservative Group Leaders Meeting in London on 22nd June this year and more recently in regards to my commitments in a recent Scrutiny

Working Group Looking at Access Issues for Disabled Persons in Slough in regards as transport costs and availability of public transport to DWP assessment Hearings.

5. From Christine Bamigbola to Councillor Nazir

“Given the Government’s offer on funds to tackle rogue landlords and the concern expressed by the National Housing Federation, can the Council tell us what it has done about the issue of rogue landlords in Slough Borough since the bill was introduced in the last three years and more recently, especially in the light of the increase in the percentage of second homes in Slough in the past year?”

Reply

Theme 2 of the current Councils Housing Strategy, derived from Outcome 4 and 3 of the Slough 5 year plan clearly sets out the Councils objectives in improving the private rented sector, which aims to make Slough a better place for living and working:

“The council wants to ensure that Slough has good quality, affordable private sector housing which meets the needs of residents, improving health, well-being, and social mobility ensuring that Slough is a thriving place to live and work.

To achieve this we have the following objective: Improve the condition of private sector homes through assistance to residents and landlords and by robust regulation where necessary to ensure health and safety standards are met”

To this end and in line with the 5 year plan and the current Housing Strategy we have been developing policies and approaches to achieve the right balance that improves housing conditions, whilst simultaneously allowing The Council to target the rogue and criminal landlords effectively without adverse effects on limited resources. This includes:

1. Increasing the size of the Housing Regulation Team from 3 officers to 7, plus an additional administration officer.
2. Develop our policies and procedures to help us consistently and effectively enforce the law.
3. As per the Housing Strategy action plan, on the 17th September 2018 the Cabinet approved the consultation process for two new licensing schemes, as required by law. In essence we are aiming to introduce two new licensing schemes to run alongside the current nationwide mandatory HMO licensing requirements. The proposed schemes are currently under statutory consultation.
4. Issued two Slough landlords with our first Civil Penalty Notices, totalling over £40,000.00. This is in place of prosecution.

Banning Orders and the Rogue Landlords Database are useful tools recently added to the Council’s enforcement options. We are aiming to develop a

holistic and all encompassing approach in improving the private sector. We aim to employ the most effective enforcement tools and consider each case on its circumstances when applying the use of civil penalties, prosecution or informally by working closely with the landlords, tenants and agencies options.

6. From Ken Wright to Councillor Hussain

“As an Independent Candidate for Wexham Lea in the Borough Council Elections May 2019 could I be advised of the reason why the Parishioners were only given 2 options to vote on in the Governance review and the 3rd option for the Parish to remain as at present not included.

This option received overwhelming support just a few years ago.”

Reply

Two questions were put to the electors in the recent poll of Wexham Court Parish Council.

The first required a yes/no answer to the Borough Council’s proposal that the Parish Council should be abolished. If an elector voted no, and therefore wished to keep the Parish Council, they were asked if they supported a reduction in size of the Parish Council.

By answering no to both questions the voter would be voting for the Parish to remain as at present. A third question was therefore not necessary and may have been confusing. Please remember that the postal poll was only part of the consultation – all electors and people interested were encouraged to submit any comments and views to the Council as part of the process.