

COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10

4-20 TO COUNCILLOR SATPAL PARMAR, CHAIR OF THE TRUSTEE COMMITTEE FROM COUNCILLOR STRUTTON (RECEIVED 19.04.21)

“As Chair of the Trustees and Charities Panel, can you please answer me with a written reply as to why the minutes and agendas of the Trustees and Charities Panel are not publicly available, and when will the minutes of the meetings attended by ward councillors in regards to Langley Memorial Park be made available on the Slough Borough Council website, as per the recommendations of the Trusts meeting last year?”

Reply

In April 2018 the Council set up a trustee committee to look after the interests of assets it holds on trust. The idea of a separate committee was to ensure that when making decisions in relation to trust assets, the trustees act within the powers of the governing document, and only in the interests of the specific charity. In setting up the Committee full Council unanimously agreed that (all) the meetings and minutes of the trustee committee should not be public, having said this the Leader committed at our last full council to reviewing the openness of trust meeting and accessibility to minutes etc, and he asked the member panel on the constitution to deliberate and make a recommendation to full council.

1-21 TO COUNCILLOR JAMES SWINDLEHURST, CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & COUNCIL PLANS FROM COUNCILLOR STRUTTON (RECEIVED 08.07.21)

“Over the past two Council Budget meetings, Opposition Councillor’s have been shouted down for questioning the financial reporting, future planning and risk management within this Authority. What about a £174 million capitalisation requirement in the years to come, or the quadrupling of borrowing sounds like a world class service to the Leader of the Council? Would the Leader of the Council now like to take this opportunity to apologise to Cllrs and the residents of Slough for the financial crisis which he has overseen and for his previous statements about them being excellent /outstanding at the time as it is now perfectly clear they were not and have not been for at least the past 6 years?”

Reply

The annual budget of the council is agreed through a formal meeting of the council. At this meeting the ruling party sets out its agenda and financial plans for the year ahead and the opposition responds with its own plans in a dedicated time-slot. Even you will concede that the opposition group has always been afforded this right, as is demonstrated by the minutes of our previous annual council meetings. Where the two parties disagree, there is debate on these differing agendas and the priorities of the council are agreed via recorded votes.

Clearly some of financial assumptions which underpinned the council's budgeting have proved to be flawed, as a result of poor forecasting from previous financial officers and there has also been some poor professional accountancy practice. For the things that have gone wrong, I am very sorry – and I have already said this publicly over recent weeks in my various interviews with our local media.

At the May Full Council meeting all councillors were presented with the first report on the 2018/19 period from our external auditors and members then had to digest the scale of issues facing the council, having done so we in the ruling group have apologised for areas where members decision-making may have contributed to the challenges faced by the council.

You often accuse the Labour Group over being over-ambitious in our aspirations to change Slough for the better. I will not apologise for having the highest ambitions to provide opportunities for our town and its people.

I appreciate that over-ambition is not something either you or your group can ever be accused of, as your groups total lack of ambition for this town has been demonstrable at nearly every council I have attended.

My group continues to be justifiably proud of the projects we have successfully delivered – our leisure estate now consists of world class facilities which are valued and well used by residents; our school estate has benefited from major investment, addressing the school places we needed to provide a few years ago and offering our children with some of the best learning facilities in the country. We continue to build the high-quality affordable and council homes our residents require, and we have made significant progress in improving Slough children's services, creating a new sustainable service model by working constructively with the Department for Education.

At the last election more than 18,000 electors voted once again to give my political party the responsibility to run this town. This responsibility now includes putting right what has gone wrong and restoring the council's finances to an even keel, so we can continue to deliver yet further positive improvements to the lives of our residents.