

# **Council**

**Thursday, 21 February 2019**

**Public Question Time and Standing Order 15 Questions**

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**COUNCIL**

**THURSDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2019**

**PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**Mr Terry Reynolds has asked the Leader of the Council:**

Is the Leader of the Council aware and would he agree:

Yet again, the council tax is to rise, as always, just under the point of a need for a vote on the matter, but a rise it is, This we are told will mean that the actual council tax is to rise by an amount of approx £50, On top of this we have the rise for the PCC Office, of £24, at a time when the PCC office alone, is costing the tax payer over 2 million pounds a year, Restraint there would be very welcome, Then we have the fire precept of around £3, and then, unknown at this time, we have the parish council precept also. These amounts when said, appear to be only a small amount, but each year they are going up, and I fear the golden goose is being bled to a point when soon it will be no longer able to sustain these rises. The Council Tax Resolution annex, show for this year the Band D total rise was £1672.41, but in fact, I paid £1683.53, for my Band D House. If this is put against the new tax rise, will it still be 4.95% as shown. I am lucky, in that I have an army pension to supplement my state pension, but as I have said, these continued rises will over come that amount and very soon. Those pensioners who do not have that fall back, will notice the rise even more so. As of yet, I do know what the state pension rise will be this year, but I don't expect to even cover these amounts proposed. I live within my means, and do not buy anything I cant afford to buy, without the need to fall into debt, perhaps the council should adopt these policies in future.

Over the last 6 months, I have raised several points with the council, over the provision of bins, for the doggy bags being dropped in the roadside by the crossing at Cricklade Road, when a house in wheeler ave, arranged for a firm to come and dig up the grass verge in the road and cover it with tarmac, so they had a means of semi off road parking, when I ask the street smart dept for an additional supply of woodchips for our allotment site, each time the answer came back, that it was now a parish council matter and no remit for the borough council. If the Council is so strapped for money, perhaps it should look at the number of Borough Councillors, who are now surely obsolete, with the tasks now carried out by the Parish Councils.

**The Leader of the Council has responded:**

The number of councillors decreased in 2012 whilst the population has continued to increase so councillors now each represent more residents than previously.

Any future changes in numbers would be part of a future Local Government Boundary Commission review. We firmly believe that local representative democracy is essential as a fundamental underpinning to a wider democratic state

As local government continues to change, so do the roles and responsibilities of councillors. There are growing not diminishing pressures on councils to respond to increasing demand from citizens and communities especially in these uncertain economic times.

## **COUNCIL**

**THURSDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2019**

### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

#### **Mr Bill Janson has asked the Leader of the Council:**

Following last month's council meeting the Council pledged to set up a cross party working group on climate change.

1. Has this been done?
2. What is it's remit?
3. How will membership be decided.

#### **The Leader has responded:**

1. Cllr Keith Williams has been appointed to lead the Working Group. To date, several pre-meetings have taken place internally to ensure that we have the correct Council departments involved and to select a member of staff to act as the committee clerk. We are planning to hold the inaugural meeting in early March, though dates for the first few meetings are still to be confirmed.

2. A skeleton work programme is currently being drafted due to the number of service areas that need an input and it is important that we keep the meetings focussed and productive. Current thinking is that we initially set an overall objective for Swindon that involves multiple parallel activities related to education, transport, planning and leisure. These can then deliver several easily quantifiable sub-projects towards an overall goal.

This is the best approach to identifying an early benefits and identify possible funding routes.

3. The membership of the Group is not prescriptive and must be cross party. I know that Cllr Williams would value the input of the Green Party, the Climate Action Network and any other local groups with a knowledge of or interest in this subject. We are also looking at external organisations such as the UK 100 to ensure we learn from others and benefit from any economies of scale in the approach we take in becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

## **COUNCIL**

**THURSDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2019**

### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**Mr John Ranford has asked the Leader of the Council:**

1. In view of the message from the IPCC that global emissions need to achieve net zero, whatever the timescale, Swindon's buildings will need to achieve this in coming years. Can the chair please confirm what the cost TO THE COUNCIL of bringing an single average dwelling in the NEV up to net-zero carbon emissions A) at construction stage and B) alternatively through retrofitting these same dwellings in some date in the medium term?
2. In view of the decision to close of the Honda plant, will the council pledge that its response to this devastating situation will be to devise and implement a strategy to actively promote sustainable businesses to locate to Swindon - businesses which aim to contribute to the long-term zero-carbon future (such as Recycling Technologies), or indeed carbon reduction technologies.

**The Leader of the Council has responded:**

1. The Council is not building houses in the NEV. This Administration supported the original plans by government to introduce zero carbon homes and joined housebuilder, planners and environmentalists in expressing our disappointment when the plans to make all new UK homes carbon neutral were scrapped.

A) The cost to this Council would be in the region of £10,000 per house in reduced s106 payments for roads, schools and community facilities. SBC would need to make up that shortfall so £10,000 times 22,000 new homes planned is £200m.

B) This is difficult to quantify as several factors will influence the cost. The costs of retrofitting can be very high, e.g. as much as £90,000 per home for the 10 home Energiesprong pilot in Nottingham

Our own Local Plan aims to ensure new developments are designed and constructed to minimise their environmental impact, and contribute to meeting statutory targets for reductions in carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. Sustainable energy is a key focus for the Borough Council and the approach to this follows the energy hierarchy in addressing energy conservation and energy efficiency before considering low and zero carbon energy generation. Whilst this policy focuses on new development, opportunities to improve the energy efficiency and resilience of existing buildings are encouraged.

Further commitment to a sustainable future for Swindon includes provision in the Emerging Parking Standards Policy of minimum of one electric charging point per dwelling as well as 20% of employment parking spaces and 20% of retail parking spaces.

2. Yes. This Council would not be serving the Honda Associates or the Town, if it did not seek to continue its strategy in line with its existing priorities and pledges. Specifically Priority 1, Pledge 2:

- With our wholly owned company, Public Power Solutions, enhance Swindon's reputation as a sustainable energy exemplar, by exploring technology that converts energy from waste, facilitating the move to electrified transport, and delivering opportunities to invest in renewable energy to reduce carbon footprint.

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**COUNCIL**

**THURSDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2019**

**STANDING ORDER 15 QUESTION**

**Councillor Jim Grant has asked the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

How much money has Swindon Borough Council spent on Swindon Housing Company from the time of its inception to today. This should include:

- \* All set up costs
- \* All running and staffing costs
- \* All other related costs including consultant costs and Swindon Borough Council officer time

**The Cabinet Member has responded:**

- Set ups costs incurred by the Council amounted to £64,023 and relate to legal, accounting and tax advice
- The Company purchases all of its services directly from the Council such as finance and audit, legal, architectural and project management. The Council incurred £153,961 in 17/18 and £198,151 in 18/19 in providing these services which were charged in full to the Housing Company, plus a premium to ensure state aid compliance, and therefore form part of the companies operating costs.
- Loans are provided to the Company by SBC and charged at state aid compliant rates which are in excess of the Councils cost of funding. Again, these charges form part of the companies operating costs.

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