

Public Question Time
Full Council
8th November 2018

Mr Martin Costello has asked the Leader of the Council:

Further to my previous question regarding Councillors monetary allowance, you claim that the elected councillors are working more than 20 hours a week which is quite astonishing.

While it is possible some do work hard, this has angered many residents in my neighbourhood who have yet to see any evidence of this, ever. It would be interesting to know how many in the chamber tonight could honestly agree with this.

To ensure the council tax payers of Swindon are getting the best value for money from those who have been elected to serve us, will the Council Leader implement a modern timesheet system so that all 20+ hrs can be accounted for and provide evidence of what has been achieved?

Councillors are fast getting a reputation of having ones 'snout in the trough' and I'm sure this is something that they would not want to be associated with. Utilising this simple system will increase efficiency and productivity across the Borough and in turn will help make Swindon a more pleasant environment for all who dwell here and attract businesses to invest in the town."

The Leader of the Council has responded:

The work carried out by councillors does not take place solely in the Civic offices. Whilst attendance at meetings is an important part of a councillor's role, they will also be doing reading and research at home, responding to emails and other messages, attending public meetings, holding surgeries, undergoing training for their roles, meeting residents privately and representing the Council on outside bodies inter alia. The Local Government Association carry out a regular survey of how many hours councillors work. The last one from 2013 can be found at:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/census-local-authority-co-c95.pdf>

This shows the average hours worked was 25 compared with 22 previously. Many of our Councillors also do unpaid voluntary or charity work, act as school governors and sit on public boards – all of which take a time commitment and much of it aids the council in its work. I am against any action that increases the bureaucracy around their public service, as many already struggle to maintain a reasonable politics/life balance, and any further restrictions are likely to put good potential candidates with jobs and families off standing for election. If we are to be representative of the communities we serve, we must make the role of Councillor more attractive, not less.

Therefore, tracking the work of all individual councillors in the way suggested is impractical and, most definitely, costly.

The ultimate arbiter of whether a councillor has worked hard enough is their electorate at election time.

