

Cabinet

Wednesday, 21 October 2020

Supplementary Papers

Public Question Time

Cabinet

21st October 2020

Mr Roy Worman, Swindon resident, has asked the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet member for Housing and Public Safety

Is there any response to the two questions I asked at the cabinet meeting 9/9/20?

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your question, to which I am pleased to provide the following written answer:

The restrictions, requirements and advice put in place to control Covid-19 have, as you say, been a mixture of both law and guidance. The Council shares responsibility for enforcing those parts which are law with the Police, and of course we also devote much effort to engaging with and educating businesses and the public on how to keep themselves and their fellow residents safe from Covid-19. Our Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP), which may be found here:

https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6569/local_outbreak_management_plan_-_june_2020 lays out the Council's public health response to the outbreak, and will evolve further as does the outbreak.

Since the start of the outbreak we have had enforcement officers devoted to liaising with businesses to ensure that they know and follow the guidance, and law. For instance; all teams with sector specific interest, such as the licensed trade, food businesses, rented and multi-occupied property, have been pushing information out to their sectors and completing advisory visits to help the sector respond to the threat.

In the early days of the outbreak enforcement was centred on the closure of businesses as part of the initial 'lockdown' of course, but as this has evolved we have moved more towards helping business follow the CoVid Secure guidance, whilst ensuring that those businesses that should remain closed do so. In general we have found that compliance with both law and guidance has been very good, and this has undoubtedly assisted Swindon in maintaining low case rates relative to some other parts of the country to date.

In many ways it is still the case that controls are a mixture of both law and guidance and it is also true to say that the law has changed very regularly to date, as has some of the guidance. The latest iteration is the introduction of the 3 tier system of controls. The legislations which forms the backbone of the new system are:

- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (Medium) (England) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 2020/1103)
- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (High) (England) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 2020/1104)

- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (Very High) (England) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 2020/1105)
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 - Schedule 1 of each of the above contains the restrictions, which escalate with each level, on both persons (for which the Police take the lead on enforcement) and business, for which the Council generally takes the lead.
- As you will know, Swindon currently benefits from relatively low Covid-19 incidence, and so is subject only to the 'Medium' (Tier 1) Regulations which is the default level unless special restrictions are needed. If cases and/or the rate of spread significantly changes, then we will become subject to the increasingly stringent controls laid out in the 'High' (Tier 2) Regulations, and then the 'Very High' (Tier 3) Regulations, at Government's direction.

I provide the preceding as background, but in direct response to your question; the Local Outbreak Management Plan, and the funding behind it, is designed to allow the Council to step up its response as needed. The new and existing Regulations seek to give us the powers to intervene formally where we need to. We currently have 2 enforcement officers seconded directly to Public Health, and their role is to be out visiting businesses every day to make sure the relevant law and guidance is followed. More resource will of course be devoted to this if need arises. All of the Council's Environmental Health, Trading Standards, and Licensing teams are also trained and authorised to use the legislation, and are ensuring that businesses are aware of the law and guidance, both in their normal run of work and also in direct support of the dedicated Covid enforcement officers when required. The Council has and does also run communications campaigns including mailshots to businesses and residences, press, television, and social media. The Health and Safety Executive and Police also regularly visit businesses for Covid-19 checks, and of course the various sector specific trade organisations are also pushing out guidance and information to their members. In the round there is much resource devoted to it.

Although there are specific restrictions for hospitality, all business is subject to restrictions and requirements, and our officers do and will continue to liaise with all, enforcing where needed. A particular focus to date has been close contact services like barbers and beauticians, for instance.

As above, our experience to date is that compliance has generally been very good and so there has only been little need for formal enforcement, but we know that could change, and that will be resourced as appropriate. In other areas which have moved up the ladder of concern, 2 things have generally occurred to help Councils cope; less of the business as usual work has been done to free up resource to fight the outbreak (this happened in the first peak where things like food and housing inspections were nationally deprioritised, for instance), and additional resource has also been provided from central Government. We would expect the same to happen again if the situation were to escalate again, and expect no problem in this area as we have prepared for that eventuality.

The Leader of the Council has responded:

As there is currently little demand for an open forum, rather than create time in the diary of 15 to 30 minutes for a 'standalone' open forum which may not be required, I am prepared

to allow additional latitude, in terms of time and scope, during public question time in the main meeting should it be required. This will ensure best use of everyone's time.

I will of course review this regularly and, should demand arise, will rethink my approach.

Luke Tremblin has submitted the following question to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change:

Table 7 of the Swindon Borough Council Carbon Reduction Strategy 2020, indicates total annual emissions for on-road transport to be 511,794 tCO₂e, out of a Borough-wide grand total of 1,532,440 tCO₂e. Table 5 states the £4.5m 'flyers' of Swindon save 1 tCO₂e every day. Has there been any study of what the potential emissions reductions would be for establishing a safe cycling route between Highworth and Swindon, or a safe cycling network in Highworth for local journeys?

The Cabinet Member has responded

Thank you for your question.

This potential piece of work has not yet been undertaken but as part of the carbon reduction implementation plan, work will be identified to understand wider carbon reduction opportunities through transport interventions, including cycle path development.

However I can tell you that a cycle route between Highworth and Swindon is an aspiration in the forthcoming Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which will be out for public consultation later this year. I do hope you will respond to the consultation as resident's ideas and suggestions will be most welcome.

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