

Public Questions
Council
23rd February 2017

Mr Brian Cockbill, Stratton, has asked

1. How committed to resolving the homeless problem in the Borough are:-
 - a) the Council?
 - b) the Conservative Group?
 - c) the Labour Group?
 - d) the Liberal Democrat Group?
 - e) each and every individual elected member of Swindon Borough Council?
 - f) each and every Director and Senior Officer of Swindon Borough Council?
 - g) each and every member of Swindon Borough Council's Housing Department?
2. What are all those referred to above in 1a) to 1g) above plan to fulfil that commitment?

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness has responded.

Thank you for your questions. I am responding on behalf of the Council Administration and the Majority Group. The Council has a wide range of statutory duties to help the most vulnerable in our society, which includes vulnerable adults, safeguarding children, assisting those with learning difficulties, as well as assisting the homeless.

The Council is extremely committed to tackling homeless in Swindon, Members are aware of the local challenges and are supported by an experienced officer team. The Council recently agreed a Homeless Strategy (2016-2021), which has received all party support and was agreed by Cabinet in 2016. The Strategy was developed in partnership with other agencies and culminated in a formal consultation event where participation was strong and a consensus was achieved on the key priorities. The evidence available sets out the following challenges:

- There will be significant growth in future of people living alone, or as lone parents, which are the groups where housing affordability is the greatest problem.
- There is a forecast shortage of approximately 335 affordable homes per year above the 300 target from the Housing Strategy.
- There is a small but significant group of people who are rough sleeping, and who have complex needs.
- For over a third of women fleeing domestic abuse, leaving their home increased the abuse.

The key agreed priorities are:

- i. Ensuring victims of Domestic Abuse are appropriately housed
- ii. Improving partnership working to support homeless people with complex needs
- iii. Preventing homelessness for people with health and care needs
- iv. Ensure we make best use of our social housing to minimise homelessness

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Mr Martin Costello has asked the Leader of the Council:

3. Following the recent significant Council Tax increase plans it is clear that many Swindonian's have lost confidence in the council, I therefore ask if the current administration will step down and hold an immediate election?
4. Given that the rises are over the 4.99% threshold, will the Council be prepared to hold a referendum on the subject before implementing the rise to obtain the public opinion?

The Leader of the Council has responded:

Thank you for your questions.

3. I do not accept the premise of your first question.
4. The average Band D Council Tax increase proposed is 4.99%, which is the maximum permitted. Last year every councillor voted for the maximum average Band D Council Tax increase of 3.99%, which meant that Opposition and Minority Group councillors also voted for increases that were below this figure for areas with parishes, and above it for those parts of the Borough without parishes.

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Mr Gavin Perry has asked the Cabinet Member for StreetSmart Highways and Transport:

5. What does SBC intend to do to restore the hard surfaces to a condition that allows them to be cleaned properly before handing the responsibility for doing so to the parishes?

Many roads in the new super parishes have no surface for a foot out onto the highway and have been neglected for years, leading to an unacceptable accumulation of filth and detritus which is impossible to remove using standard methods employed by StreetSmart and is made worse by the use of wire mix brushes on road sweepers.

6. How much budget is set aside for these repairs?
7. How are you intending to effect these repairs in the short time available before the hand over on April Fools Day 2017?"

Enviro Crime;

We have many times been promised a robust approach by SBC Environmental Enforcement to deal with the daily deliveries of fly tip into the Broadgreen area but have yet to see much evidence of that in operation or effect.

8. Please explain why your enviro crime team are hardly ever there to catch the perpetrators and why there are so few prosecutions, even though there is often abundant evidence of the source of the waste?

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your questions.

5, 6 and 7 I will provide a written response within ten working days.

8 I do not accept the premise of the question. The EnviroCrime team patrols the Broadgreen area weekly and from November 2016 to date, the team has carried out over 30 investigations, conducted 9 interviews under caution, issued 29 verbal warnings for offences found on patrol, and issued 7 Fixed Penalty Notices. There are a further 5 interviews under caution to be scheduled. Fly tipping, when reported, is usually responded to within 24 – 48 hours however removal may be delayed because an investigation needs to be undertaken. The EnviroCrime Team is well trained in the collection of evidence and preparing files for prosecution and are the best placed to determine whether a prosecution is viable and in the public interest and the use of warnings and cautions are often times more suitable to the nature of the offence. The Council is however looking to introduce a fixed penalty notice for Fly Tipping which may in many instances be more appropriate than warnings,

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cautions and prosecutions but this will be determined on a case by case basis by a trained team of professionals.

Many instances of Fly Tipping within the Broadgreen area are found to be on private land, which means that the Council will not remove these items as they are the responsibility of the landowner. In order to address this problem the Council will be looking to utilise Community Protection Notices to assist in removing fly tipping from private land.

Fly tipping and littering is a significant problem within Broadgreen and the root cause needs to be addressed through education and enforcement combined; the previous activity of just collecting fly tipped items only served to mask the size of the problem that exists and effected no significant behavioural change amongst residents. To this end, a regular clinic is carried out at Broadgreen Community Centre for residents to attend to report and discuss any concerns regarding waste so that appropriate action may be taken; 7 clinics have been held since November 2016 which have been attended by 52 residents resulting in 10 actions undertaken with the rest being given advice and guidance. As a result, residents have asked us to provide this service in the evening as well and our first evening clinic is the 1st March, we are hoping that this will enable us to reach more residents and influence behaviours in the area.

The EnviroCrime team will continue to work in the Broadgreen area to bring about the behaviour change that is required to significantly reduce the culture of fly tipping and littering which is engrained within a large majority of the community.

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Mr Brian Cockbill has asked the Cabinet Member for StreetSmart, Highways and Transport:

9. When was the last inspection of the entire length of the road surface of Sywell Road, Stratton St Margaret carried out.
10. What areas were discovered as necessary for repair?

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your questions

9. We inspect Sywell Road twice each year and we last inspected the road on 30th November 2016.

10 The inspection note two pothole defects, which we have already repaired. Two sections of lower priority footway patching remain in our programme identified last year. We will repair these as resources become available. Our approach is in line with national guidance.

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Mr Terry Reynolds, Wheeler Avenue, has asked the Cabinet Member for Communities

11. It has been reported that the new Swindon Central South Parish as incurred the following amounts of charges for Salaries, Expenses and general admin: £249,000 and £59,900. As these parish councils have yet to start doing their tasks, can the public be told how these amounts had come about, and does the Swindon Central North Parish also face such charges?

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your question.

11 These are matters for shadow parish councils to answer. Please contact the chairs: Councillor Des Moffatt Central Swindon North fendessy@yahoo.co.uk or Cllr Chris Watts, Central Swindon South cllrchriswatts@outlook.com , the transitions parish clerk Joyce Holman (jholman@swindon.gov.uk) or you can attend the public question time at a shadow parish council meeting and ask these questions.

