

Mr Martin Costello has asked the Leader of the Council:

- 1) The role of parish councils is to and I quote from the SBC website “representing local needs, delivering services to meet local needs, seeking to improve the quality of life and community well-being”. With this in mind, how does the removal of the recycling centres and reduction in the waste tip opening hours help promote this? In my area alone, many elderly folk who have regularly recycled large quality of items now cannot do so without going to the council tip, many of whom have no means of getting there. This also does nothing to promote the environmental policies that the government and other bodies have been keen to implement in recent history.

The Leader of the Council has responded:

- 1) Thank you for your question. This is a matter for the Cabinet Member for StreetSmart, Highways and Transport, whose portfolio covers recycling.

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your question. You may have confused the roles of parishes and the Borough Council. The Borough is responsible for the kerb-side rubbish and recycling collections and these services are operating effectively. As set out on the Council’s website: “New Residents are entitled to two, free recycling bins; although an additional bin may be purchased for £5.00 (including delivery to your home) or for £4.50 if you collect it yourself from the Household Waste Recycling Centre.”

We have made extensive improvements to the layout of the Household Waste and Recycling Centre to reduce queuing times and I am confident that Swindon residents will continue to dispose of their rubbish and recycled items correctly.

Mr Martin Costello has asked the Leader of the Council:

- 2) With the fact in mind that government funding will gradually be phased out over the next 3 years and business rates cannot be relied upon to top this up, what are your forecasts for the increase in council tax year on year over this period in terms of percentage? Above or below 5%? As recently reported in the Swindon Advertiser, the council have committed to a £600k education grant over the next 3 years so there must be a financial forecast in place to allow for this.

The Leader has responded:

- 2) Thank you for your question: The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services oversee the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your question. As Cabinet discusses and updates the Medium Term Resourcing Plan at Cabinet at frequent intervals, this information is in the public domain at public libraries or the Council's website
<http://ww5.swindon.gov.uk/moderngov/uuCoverPage.aspx?bcr=1>.

Please see the Cabinet papers for 16th June 2016 and 19th October 2016, as well the final Budget papers for 8th February 2017.

If you consult the Cabinet Forward plan, which is available on the Council's website, you will see that we have already set a provisional date to review the Medium Term Resourcing Plan in October 2017.

Mr Martin Costello has asked the Leader of the Council:

3) Further to my recent communication to the Council leader in response to my question regarding the unprecedented and highest Council Tax rises in the UK, there is no legal reason as to why a Referendum should not be held. Subsequently from the Council Leaders response it suggests to me the sole reason that a Referendum will not be conducted is due solely to the cost. I challenge this and therefore insist that this is not an acceptable reason to refrain from holding a referendum on this issue. Given that elections are being held on the 4th May this would significantly reduce the cost, however even it was to double the cost, one cannot put a value on the price of democracy and subsequently would indeed be worth very penny. The very notion of parishes was never suggested when the current cabinet was campaigning for office and for such a fundamental change to the system it is only fair to ask those who you represent for their opinion. As you will be aware, the parishes are not legally recognised until an election is held.

I have asked Swindon South MP Robert Buckland QC in his role as 'Solicitor General for England and Wales' multiple times for his advice on this matter. Unfortunately after almost a month I have had no response and can only assume that his silence indicates loopholes in the law were indeed exploited to impose this parish system on the electorate. I have also suggested to Mr Buckland that given his conflict of interest with a Conservative cabinet a full independent investigation should be carried out immediately to ensure the mechanics of this process have been conducted fairly. A 4.99% cap was originally placed on Council Tax rises to protect those who are most financially vulnerable in society regardless if this does not technically apply to parishes, so this also raises many moral issues.

Failure to hold a referendum now would draw similar parallels to that of former Prime Minister David Cameron and his arrogance before being forced to hold a vote on the UK's membership with the European Union that witnessed his opinion conflict with that of the general public. The lesson learnt here alone suggests it would be wise to consult the electorate on this subject. I also note that the Council Leader made no attempt to deny my suggestion that the Parish system was imposed on the electorate to raise extra income by avoiding holding a referendum on such a significant increase.

For these very reasons and I know for fact that I speak on behalf of many, many Swindonian's we must insist that a referendum is either held on (a) whether the electorate agree for the parishes to be implemented or (b) whether the electorate agree with the proposed rises. Please will the Council give assurance that this will be carried out at the earliest opportunity? Failure to do this is a failure for democracy and I'm certain the Council Cabinet would not want to be viewed as advocates of this.

The Leader of the Council has responded:

Thank you for your questions.

- 1) Swindon Borough Council's average Band D Council Tax rise is not the highest. If you read the correct column on the DCLG website (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-tax-levels-set-by-local-authorities-in-england-2017-to-2018> Table 7) you will see that there the increase for which the Borough is responsible is 4.99%, so there is no legal reason to hold a referendum. The figure used by other political parties includes parish precepts, which are outside this Council's control. Even then, Swindon residents pay less than many other nearby local authorities.
- 2) The main reason why there should be no referendum is that the Council tax is within the capping limit set by government. I refute your inaccurate statement that there would be no extra costs, because there would have been considerable unbudgeted expense.
- 3) The Shadow Parish Councils have acted lawfully with appropriate advice, where requested, from an experienced, qualified parish clerk and the Borough's Director of Law and Democratic Services.
- 4) If you read the Council papers from 23rd February, you will see that the Council Tax decision is dependent on the budget. In order to know how much tax you need to raise you must first know how much you need to spend. To date, no alternative budget has been proposed, not by you and not by the Opposition or Minority Groups on the Council.
- 5) The Council followed the correct legal processes as part of the Community Governance Review. There was no legal requirement for a referendum and Council resolved not to hold a consultative poll.