

COUNCIL MEETING – 22 February 2023

CABINET QUESTION TIME

1. Question from Councillor R Gisby to the Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford

On Monday 13th February, we woke to the devastating news of an attack which had taken place in Moulsham Lodge, resulting in the tragic loss of a young man's life. We later learnt the victim to be Andy Wood, just 16 years of age and described as a 'kind and Loving young man'. My thoughts and those of so many, remain with his family and friends at such a difficult time. As we seek to understand, many are wondering about the circumstances surrounding the incident. I am sure in time we will learn more, but no matter what the situation, it takes nothing away from the tragic loss of a young life.

In the months prior to this incident, and each day subsequently, I have spoken with residents of my Ward, in Chislett Row, Waterson Vale and Lister Tye. The police are confident that this was 'an isolated incident', but for residents I must share that that the overbearing feeling is that 'something' was inevitable. They shared that repeated requests have been made to this Council to cut back undergrowth and spoken of the challenges of gatherings in the screened areas and play areas in the Chislett Row green space and Burghley Way. Residents have been raising their concerns in this area for many months. There are ongoing issues around antisocial and illicit behaviour in the wider space, including littering and fly-tipping, fire setting, damage to trees and suspected drug use and dealing. All of this taking place on Council land. Local residents' concerns have been repeatedly dismissed by this Council, including in a letter to our Member of Parliament by the Chief Executive last August, which categorically states that "an appropriate plan of action" was in place to manage antisocial behaviour. Clearly this was not the case.

Not only do residents feel that their existing concerns are not being listened to, many have felt that the approach of the playground renewal and relocation project has been doggedly inflexible with respect to the concerns from residents about the possible negative impact on anti-social behaviour. A petition objecting to the location and style of the new play equipment was signed by a significant number of residents.

Residents, myself and indeed representatives of Essex Police have met at the park location on more than one occasion and have discussed practical concerns with Officers and Members. We have been clear that the new location brings challenges for antisocial behaviour, through creating shelter with screen planting, the new position not being visible from the road further removing the deterrent of motorists and patrolling Police cars who cannot see the play area from vehicles.

In light of the tragic events of last week, I would like to ask the Cabinet Member for her commitment on a number of points:

- Will the Cabinet Member commit to take immediate steps to review options for the wooded area adjacent Waterson Vale / Chislett Row and how this can either be

sympathetically improved to reduce natural screening or fenced on the remaining part of the perimeter.

- Will the Cabinet Member insist on, and take part in, a multi-agency review of the green space and play area in Chislett Row / Waterson Vale to ensure the right level of CCTV coverage, lighting and other measures are understood and provisioned for including the suggestion to ensure the play area is lockable out of hours.
- Will the Cabinet Member support the use of a Public Spaces Protection Order, should it come to this Council.
- And finally, will the Cabinet Member apologise to the residents of the local area for not taking their very real concerns more seriously and acting sooner.

Cabinet Member to respond

2. Question from Councillor A Sosin to the Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford

The last minute announcement of the requirements of voter id will place extra work on the Democratic Services Department. Will this require extra resources to be transferred to this department to handle the extra requirements including the provision of the " Voter Authority Certificate", the influx of postal vote requests to avoid voter i.d. and extra requirements at polling stations? It is also a concern there is a risk of abuse of pol workers and unrest at polling stations. Will extra security staff or police be necessary?

Regards

Cabinet Member to respond

3. Question from Councillor W Daden to the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford

7.3 Budget

Does this administration share my concern at how much the government has slashed local authority's budgets, this councils from approx. £10 million to under £3.5million in recent years; Mr Reeves has made strong representation to Civil Servants that Chelmsford City Council's long term financial sustainability is under threat, reading this report his concerns appear to be ignored.

Can you confirm if that is correct? or what help is government offering to fill this gap its created?

Chelmsford MPs (Kemi Badenoch and Vicky Ford); have they been supportive of Mr Reeves and this city council receiving funding either in line with inflation, population growth, MPs pay rise, or do they expect residents to sustain this significant funding gap in these depressing times?

Council Tax: section 8

I am sure we all have sympathy for struggling hard working families and the hardship government decision inflict on them; How many wilful nonpayers of council tax are there. Residents the council deems capable of paying but are choosing not to :

- What are the reasons presented to this council?

If this situation exists:

- How are we addressing this situation?
- What is the loss to council tax ?
- What is the cost of retrieving this tax?

Cabinet Member to respond