

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 14 February 2024

1) Question from Mr D Ingham to Councillor S Spencer, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budget

“I’m acutely concerned regarding the Council’s finances and Council Tax increase proposals for many people. All steps should be taken to secure increased Central Government funding where appropriate.

I’m uncertain if Council quarterly performance metrics are taken into account externally for such decision making. Many of the current performance metrics (Quarter 2) are recorded as “Strong” or “Good”. However, after reviewing past reports, outcomes in numerous cases are because targets have been lowered. If adjusted back to originally set targets, current actual performance would actually fall below these levels.

It would appear to those on the outside targets are currently being exceeded, but only because certain targets have been lowered. Wouldn’t the case for increased Government funding be better supported and served by reversing those previously lowered targets, in order to demonstrate the reality of current underperformance despite all best intent, which will be underfunding related in many cases?”

Response:

“I just want to assure you that over recent months Councillor Lewis at a national level has been campaigning for further funding from Central Government on behalf of this Authority and the wider local authorities across the country as the Vice-Chairman of the CCN and the financial spokesman and I likewise have been doing the same locally. That will continue and will be the case moving forward.

With regard to the performance information you mentioned, well let me start with the local government mechanism for funding local authorities. I think it is widely recognised, Mr Ingham, that the mechanism is out of date and not now fit for purpose. I think there needs to be an ongoing debate with representatives of the CCN and Local Government Authority on that particular issue and that will continue. We for many years have been campaigning for multi-year settlements and a consistent way of budgeting moving forward.

With regard to the targets we are far more transparent and have been over the last two years than we ever have been before with regard to targets, information which is set aside with regard to the financial position of the Council and the detail that supports that with performance targets. We set those performance targets in line with neighbouring authorities and data that is provided for us at a national level and they are adjusted accordingly. They change and they are monitored throughout the year, Mr Ingham, please be

assured, as you know because you have been attending those meetings so please have my assurances those will continue to be monitored and we will continue to lobby for further funding from Central Government with regard to the challenges the Authority faces.”

Supplementary question:

“Having looked at the reports again and given targets appear sort of centred around what Council considers it can deliver and what is considered to be appropriate rather than what is actually an ideal situation with adequate funding etc, I just wonder if I can ask yourself and Councillor Lewis, who I know are both actively involved in doing everything you can for this Council, and Councillor Lewis’s over budget strategy, between yourselves whether or not with the combined support of all members in this room cross-Party can ensure that when the 2024-25 targets are agreed they are actually set in all cases to the levels that the Council aspires to to deliver within Derbyshire?”

I personally have no issue with reported Council underperformance if it is based against correct high bars rather than strong performance based on low bars. I don’t believe Derbyshire should settle on being an average performing Council based upon the lowest common denominator to assess performance and I do feel like this open change of approach could really demonstrate where funding gaps exist and to aid securement for this Council?”

Response:

“If I understand you correctly, Mr Ingham, what we need to do is set targets that are achievable, sustainable and inspire our staff and our organisation to deliver. As I have already said earlier on in the meeting we set those targets based on our neighbouring Authorities’ performance and all national data on all aspects of Council delivery.

You are right to say that we should aspire to be the best we can be and that will always be the case with Derbyshire County Council as long as I am here and responsible for those statistics. I do genuinely believe that in the face of challenging circumstances our Council continues to deliver; our staff continue to deliver and we perform to the best ability we can with the resources we have available to ourselves.”