

COUNCIL – 28TH SEPTEMBER 2023

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Received from Councillor Matloob to Lead Member for Leisure, Community Cohesion, Regulation, Enforcement & Planning

What steps are the new administration planning to support and celebrate the LGBTQI+ community within Slough?

Reply

Thank you, Councillor Matloob, for your question. Nationally the LGBTQI+ acronym has been updated to LGBTQI2S+, which is more inclusive of other groups who, are now positively represented under this established and recognised umbrella.

The council's role as an enabling authority extends to community cohesion and celebrating the diversity of our residents, businesses, partners, and staff. The council's current financial position means we do not directly deliver events which includes any which support and celebrate the LGBTQI2S+ community currently. However, any significant changes to services, including Savings Plans, are accompanied by Equality Impact Assessments to provide assurance that we understand how our services impact on any group with a protected characteristic including gender and sexuality.

More specifically the council acknowledges that its Community Cohesion plan is due to be updated and this will be done in close collaboration with a range of community groups such as Spectrum, to ensure that LGBTQI2S+ communities are integral to the development of the plan. If residents or groups want to host events to celebrate and support this, or any other, community they would be welcomed and encouraged to book any of our community spaces and/or contact the Events and Commercial Officer in the Communications Team if they want to hold a public outdoor event.

Received from Councillor Instone to Lead Member for Leisure, Community Cohesion, Regulation, Enforcement & Planning

Can the Lead Member confirm whether or not he, or any other councillor, has bid for any council assets that are currently working through disposal?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Instone for your question. I can confirm that I have not placed any bid for Council assets that are being disposed; and that no Councillor has registered as a bidder at upcoming auctions or submitted an interest in other assets through different disposal processes.

Received from Councillor Akram to Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

Can the Lead Member please update the council on any meetings held with our local bus operators, Great Western Rail, Heathrow Airport or local private hire organisations?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Akram for your question. Officers and I have a regular and ongoing dialogue with all key transport operators, including those listed but also TfL and other bus companies. As Lead Member for Transport, I Chair the Enhanced Partnership meetings with all the operators in Slough (including TfL) on service improvement and infrastructure enhancements.

Recent examples of successful lobbying include getting the gate line at slough station repaired after being put out of action by a leak, and ongoing discussion with Heathrow Airport around bus provision and managing the impact of ULEZ.

Received from Councillor Gahir to Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

Is the Lead Member concerned by the news that developers promoting important sites for residential delivery in Slough, have increasingly chosen to disinvest from the local market - how will she ensure that much needed housing sites are coming through the system as the required rate.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Gahir for your question. To date, there has been no significant disinvestment from Slough by residential developers. There are a number of sites with planning consent which are on hold due to the unfavourable economic climate and the accumulated effects of COVID, the war in Ukraine and energy increases on build costs. Schemes are however continuing to go through the planning process, such as the next phase of the Horlicks factory. The administration are keen to promote Slough, and significant work is already underway to promote Slough to the development industry. In respect of the High Street, the developer (ADIA) are reviewing their position in light of the changed economic circumstances and retail environment. We are in a dialogue with them, and the relevant government agencies to explore ways that the redevelopment can be brought forward either by them or other parties either as consented or in a modified form.

Received from Councillor Mann to Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

Can the lead member for housing confirm how many 'ad hoc' regulatory and compliance checks have been undertaken by the council of properties registered under the landlord licensing scheme within the last 12 months?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Mann for your question. The private rented sector (PRS) plays a significant role in the housing market. In England, the PRS has grown significantly in recent years, with 4.6 million households renting their homes from a private landlord in 2021/22, representing 19% of all households in England. The PRS provides long-term accommodation for many households, including families with children. However, the PRS has the worst housing conditions compared to owner-occupied and social-rented homes. The English Housing Survey (EHS) estimated that in 2021, 23% of PRS homes did not meet the Decent Home Standard – around 1 million homes. The Government's white paper, A fairer private rented sector, was published on 16 June 2022. It set out a 12-point action plan to deliver "a fairer, more secure, higher quality private rented sector" and included commitments to halve the number of non-decent rented homes by 2030 and require privately rented homes to meet the Decent Homes Standard for the first time.

Slough is already addressing this issue through the work of the Housing Regulation Team. In the last 12 months, the Housing Regulation team have conducted 350 'compliance checks' from a total of 3805 licensed properties. We define 'ad-hoc compliance checks' as desktop audits which involve the Council requesting information and copies of documents from licence holders to demonstrate compliance with a variety of licence conditions. Properties that fail the compliance check are allocated to a Housing Regulation Officer for a more detailed inspection.

At the time of preparing this response, it was not possible to calculate the number of properties inspected due to technical issues and access to our database. Officers will be able to provide this information as soon as it is possible.

Received from Councillor Ajaib to Lead Member for Transport, Housing, Highways, the Environment and Environmental Services

With successful sale of assets in last financial year especially the panettoni site netting council over £100M net profit. This and sale of other sites had brought down the council overall debt position down from £760M to around £357M by April 2023. This has led to improving the council finances removing the need to sell the council HRA housing stock. So, can the lead member for housing confirm that the council has discounted the sale of council of HRA housing stock thus keeping all of the council social housing stock in council ownership.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Ajaib for your question. At this moment, no significant work has been done on the whole sale transfer of the Council's Housing stock and this would be a very substantial undertaking which would take several years. Given the pressure the Housing Association sector is under, the market for large scale stock transfer has effectively disappeared and the nature and condition of Slough's stock and levels of debt over hand present challenges to transfer with a positive receipt to the General Fund. Sales of surplus HRA sites will however be pursued to generate capital to improve the existing stock and improve the general environment. Right to buy sales are also likely to continue.

Received from Councillor Qaseem to Lead Member for Public Protection, Customer Service, IT and Young Futures

Can the Lead Member confirm what he is doing to improve customer services response times including calls answered and waiting times?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Qaseem for your question. We are undertaking a Customer Services Improvement Plan, which combines a number of improvement initiatives. These include improving the Interactive Voice Response (the options presented to callers); improving and signposting provision and examining performance measures, and we have initiated deep dives into individual service areas. Our short term requirement is to deliver a plan which leads to the staged removal of the additional temporary staff by the end of 2023/24, while at the same time continuing our commitment to reduce call waiting times and to increase the percentage of calls answered. I would encourage all residents and members to use the slough.gov.uk website wherever they can – it's usually quicker and easier to find your answer or submit your query/request online. In doing so, you are helping us to answer calls from those who are unable to go online.

Received from Councillor Hulme to Lead Member for Public Protection, Customer Service, IT and Young Futures

Can the lead member for regulatory services confirm how many licensed premises there are in Slough, and how many reviews of licensed premises have taken place within the last 2 years?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Hulme for your question. I can confirm that there are currently 299 premises licenses issued by this authority under the Licensing Act 2003, of which 245 are for alcohol and 54 are non-alcohol. There have been 4 Licensing reviews in the last 2 years.

Received from Councillor Anderson to the Leader

Can the Leader please confirm the number of complaints made against councillors since the start of this municipal year?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Anderson for your question. Since May 2023, four formal complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct have been received across the political parties present in Slough.