

## **QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 3 October 2024**

### **Question 1: Question from Councillor Kay to Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council;**

“This question is about the absence of planning enforcement, of which I’ve got three cases in my ward. Going by the law of averages, this means there must be at least 150 similar cases throughout the Borough.

Case 1: The Council neglects to use its powers, under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act, to compel a householder to improve land which, undoubtedly, ‘adversely affects the amenity’ of other residents. And this, despite the fact that, in the past, action by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council has been successful against the same person for a similar infringement. Despite numerous complaints from myself, and neighbours, it’s months since any of this Council’s planning or legal officers have even visited the site; let alone commenced enforcement proceedings.

Case 2: Recently, a former chapel was converted, with planning permission, into a domestic dwelling. At the rear, there is a high balcony overlooking a neighbour’s garden. For this reason, it was conditioned that the balcony’s balustrade must be of obscure glass. Despite complaints, and representations by me, this condition has not been adhered to. Again, our senior management obdurately shies away from enforcement.

Case 3: A domestic property is being used to carry out a considerable, obtrusive car sales business on a small housing estate. The drive is often crammed with cars, whilst numerous vehicles, some untaxed, at times spill out on to the adopted highway, including a turning area. Pictures have been sent to Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council. The nearby public highways are used to store both taxed and untaxed vehicles. Despite this obvious non-conforming use our senior management remains studiously disinterested!

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council’s planners, lawyers and members spend hours agonising over planning laws and conditions. But, it appears that this is a toothless, paper exercise.

What’s the point of planning laws and conditions when enforcement is virtually non-existent?

The evidence is that you can do whatever you like, to the detriment of your neighbours, without any fear of investigation or redress!”

### **Question 2: Question from Councillor Curr to Councillor Brook, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:**

“A recent internal audit report said this Council has significant weaknesses in the arrangements for its CCTV. The report by Veritau said:

- The Council had been unable to confirm that CCTV operations had been fully checked for compliance with the legislation.
- There was a lack of a structured approach to maintenance.
- There was no central register to identify the location of all CCTV equipment.
- There was no formal arrangement with third parties hosting CCTV on the Council's behalf to identify and mitigate any associated risks.

I understand we are investing £260,000 from the Levelling Up monies awarded by the last government to improve CCTV, including new cameras and control room. Actions have been agreed to address the above failings.

We are concerned about the timeframe for this work, having been promised updated CCTV in Guisborough for the whole time I have been a Councillor. Smashed shop windows are unfortunately an ongoing, regular occurrence on our high streets. They are a very visible crime and are particularly detrimental to feelings of safety for our residents.

The promised CCTV for Bakehouse Square is also proving illusive. We are now told that tree works are required, for which permission is needed, before it can be installed. Surely this could have been part of the original project plan which is already considerably over time?

Can we please have some definitive timescales for installing a fit for purpose CCTV system in Guisborough Town Centre and across the borough?"

**Question 3: Question from Councillor Taylor to Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council:**

"Given that ward allowances were halved in 2023 and the Community Development Officers (CDOs) have been removed, will the Council consider taking responsibility for the provision and management of Christmas trees across the borough? Currently, many councillors are allocating a significant portion of their limited annual ward allowances to cover the costs associated with the trees, including purchase, light testing, installation, decoration, connection, and disposal.

For example, in Eston, the total cost for one tree in 2022 was £1,282, which included:

- Tree purchase: £272
- Collection, installation, and removal: £454
- Service, repair, and light testing: £92
- Electrical connection (plugging in): £461

By 2023, this cost had increased to nearly £1,500. In addition, we also fund trees in other areas, such as Lazenby village. With roughly 12 trees across the area, some of which are funded by local town parishes or estates, these costs consume over half of the annual ward allowances for the areas who need to fund.

Last year, working alongside our CDO, we were able to negotiate a more affordable comprehensive package with the contractor, which included all trees being handled

on a single contract at a fixed price, rather than individual high-cost bills for each location.

Will the Council now consider arranging a similar comprehensive package deal for the provision, installation, maintenance, and disposal of Christmas trees across the borough?

Such an arrangement could result in significant cost savings and allow councillors to allocate their reduced ward funds towards other pressing community needs and allow these areas to continue enjoying a Christmas Tree”.

**Question 4: Question from Councillor Learoyd to Councillor Nightingale, Chair of Corporate Resources and Governance Scrutiny & Improvement Committee.**

“On the 27th June 2024, I asked you why you hadn't responded to the Ridgewell Report into Teesworks and STDC. As a reminder you were a scrutiny member of the council at the TVCA during the period in question. You read an answer to my question and it resembled a legal reply. When I then sent a F.O.I. request to see who had written the reply for you, it was a lawyer at the TVCA.

Why did you not feel comfortable answering the question in your own words?”

**Question 5: Question from Councillor Learoyd to Councillor Earl, Cabinet Member for Health, Welfare and Housing**

“A group of doctors congregated outside Newcastle Civic Centre on 14 September to protest against your administration's 400000 tonne incinerator plan. They warned the incinerator "would have multiple negative health impacts especially in an area which already faces significant public health challenges." You've openly supported the incinerator in this council chamber and defended it in a previous question I have posed to you.

Which doctor is correct, you or those doctors who want to see an end to the incinerator?”

**Question 6: Question from Councillor Learoyd to Councillor Morgan, Chair of Governance Committee:**

“An FOI from 25th July 2024 served on the council's monitoring officer reveals an interesting thread.

It reveals a councillor from the political group that you lead quizzing the Monitoring Officer if there was enough evidence to take another councillor to a code of conduct hearing. The Monitoring Officer, rather rash in his approach on this occasion, engaged in the conversation. Worryingly, you were then sent the email by the councillor as though you were part of the plotting.

A previous FOI showed you having an email exchange with the Managing Director regarding a desire to remove a councillor from a chairmanship.

These revelatory FOIs question your standing and ability to act as Chair of the Governance Committee, and the fiduciary responsibility it holds.

Considering the evidence your willingness to be involved in skullduggery and vendetta, why should any councillor in this chamber trust that the code of conduct is being administered with any reasonableness and neutrality?"

**Question 7: Question from Councillor Learoyd to Councillor Smith Chair of Regulatory Committee:**

"On 25th July 2024 I asked you if you have ever had pressure put on you, while a member or as Chairman of the Regulatory Committee, to accept a planning application due to the potential cost of an appeal if an application were rejected. Examining the minutes from the meeting, you avoided answering the question. Why was this?"