

QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 19 December 2024

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

“The recent edition of the Council Magazine, “This is Redcar & Cleveland”, includes datal alterations to Household Waste and Recycling Collections over the Christmas Period. Such alterations only affect households who normally put out their bins on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Don't get me wrong; the crews deserve their Christmas holidays. But, it's a disastrous mistake for you to impose revised collection days as much as 6, 7 and 8 days in advance of normal collection dates.

Surely, the revised collection dates should not be long before but, instead, shortly after the normal collection dates. Then, if people mistakenly put out their bins, on the normal day of collection, they can simply be left in situ for a short time until emptying.

No matter how much publicity you have put out about earlier-than-normal collections, hundreds of householders will, understandably, fail to conform. After all, remembering refuse collection dates, is hardly at the top of their Christmas list. Inevitably, unemptied, crammed Yuletide bins will overflow on to our streets.

Do you intend leaving these unemptied bins, overflowing with Christmas waste and recyclables, in situ, until, in the second week of January, the normal cycle kicks back in? If so, there will be massive public protest with this Council being well and truly rubbished. Or, will you deplete our crews and limited resources with a wide-ranging, unplanned, unbudgeted catch-up?

Either way, Labour is failing this Council and its people. Why should they pay through the nose for unrealistic planning and trash? “

Question 2: Question from Councillor Grogan to Councillor Earl, Cabinet Member for Health and Welfare:

“With the removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance around 10 million pensioners will lose this payment (from House of Commons Library) from which a potential 4000 pensioners in the country might die (a statistic which Labour came up with 2017) in a desperate choice of heating or eating.

Members in this chamber will blame the Conservatives for this "blackhole" rightly or wrongly, but it was this current Government that removed the Winter Fuel Allowance.

This Council has rightly released press and media coverage and the members in this chamber have spread the word about Pension Credit. We have also told our elderly and their families and friends and there has been an increase in claiming of 145% of the credit (from the DWP) in the last 8 weeks. Great we think, but only 17% were eligible for support (again from the DWP).

In England, many local authorities (1 in 5 based on Radio 4 Moneybox Programme) have stepped in. The LGA does not have specifics and doesn't know which councils are offering this, but around 50 of them are, and here in the North East, North Tyneside Council are using their own hardship funds as well as the government's own Household Support Fund to offer a direct replacement.

The Household Support Fund has qualifying criteria, like receiving Housing Benefit or Council Tax reduction (sourced from North Tyneside Council).

Did you and this Council look to accessing the Government's Household Support Fund for those pensioners that are just missing out?"

Question 3: Question from Councillor Pugh to Councillor Brook, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

"The area around Spencerbeck Shops continues to be a hotspot for Anti-Social Behaviour, illegal offroad bikes, and other crime including drug dealing. Earlier this year I joined some of our wardens on a walkabout in the area, and they told me that of all the designated hotspots in the Borough, Spencerbeck was the hotspot which was the most troublesome. They also told me that in at least one incident they had actually been attacked by thugs on offroad bikes, wielding sticks and wooden polls, but this hadn't been caught on camera - there was no CCTV in the area to capture it.

I raised this issue earlier in the year in full Council in response to Councillor Pallister's growth report, as I was aware that a significant amount of money had been set aside to modernise and improve the Council's CCTV systems across Redcar & Cleveland from the Borough's Levelling Up Partnership.

Recently, after incidents in Kirkleatham Ward, it has been announced that a CCTV system is to be installed at Greengates playpark. Good news. If the Council has the financial means to install new CCTV cameras, can Councillor Adam Brook confirm whether Spencerbeck Shops is a site being considered for a new CCTV system?"

Question 4: Question from Councillor Pugh to Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council:

“A planning application for 234 new homes at the bottom of Skippers Lane has been proposed. There's a number of problems with this application and I will be objecting to it. If the Leader of the Council is familiar with Skippers Lane, I'm sure he'll agree a road of that size is not fit to accommodate 500 additional cars.

The reality is though, despite the objections of local residents, and I expect from fellow ward Councillors representing Normanby, Teesville, and South Bank, additional development at Normanby High Farm seems inevitable.

Does the Leader of the Council agree in principle that new developments like this one should be tied to Section 106 Obligations, to ensure that this Authority is appropriately imbursed to provide the infrastructure necessary to meet the demands such developments incur on local services? “

Question 5: Question from Councillor Taylor to Councillor Quartermain, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport:

“The Woodlands Centre at Flatts Lane is a cherished community asset, widely used by local families, schoolchildren, walkers, and dog owners for recreation, mental well-being, and leisure. The recent proposal to introduce parking charges at this site has raised significant concern among TS6 residents.

Given that:

1. These charges will disproportionately affect local families, as the centre is primarily used by residents in the TS6 area.
2. The charges are likely to lead to increased illegal and dangerous parking on Flatts Lane, nearby estates, and the NHS building, creating serious safety risks.
3. TS6 has fewer recreational spaces compared to other areas, making the Woodlands Centre an essential resource for local families.

Will the Cabinet Member commit to visiting the site this week to witness these concerns first-hand and, in light of this, agree to pause the process immediately to avoid unnecessary expenditure on traffic regulation orders and public consultation? This will allow the council to reconsider the decision, ensuring that local families are not unfairly penalized and safety risks are mitigated.”

Question 6: Question from Councillor Martin to Councillor Quartermain, Cabinet Members for Highways and Transport:

“I’ve seen the recent news about the lollipop person who went above and beyond to ensure the safety of schoolchildren, even in a dangerous situation. Her actions prevented potential harm to students, and I commend her dedication. I also commend the courts for delivering justice to the reckless driver involved.

This incident highlights the vital role of lollipop crossings in keeping our children safe. With this in mind, I’d like to draw attention to two dangerous crossings on Jubilee Road and Bankfields Road, which have been without lollipop staff for several years.

Given the importance of safety for our children, will you support us in reinstating these essential crossings? Your backing could make a significant difference in ensuring the safety of local families.”

Question 7: Question from Councillor Thomson to Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council:

“Given the White paper on local government reform indicates that "new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks" and that, " for most areas this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more", where does the future of Redcar & Cleveland Council lie?”

Question 8: Question from Councillor Joy to Councillor Suthers, Cabinet Members for Children:

“I imagine that most people would agree that the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme offers our young people an invaluable chance to learn leadership skills, promoting physical activity and encouraging volunteering and a real chance of extending life skills and ensuring participants to learn, contribute and develop personally.

Guisborough Youth Club used to provide access to the Gold Award and recently the last cohort of participants received their Gold awards at Buckingham Palace – a hugely proud moment for all concerned.

Changes to the licencing of the scheme means that the Youth Centre cannot now offer the Gold Award to anyone from this Borough. The only people able to access the Gold Award are those attending colleges who are participating in the scheme...though none of them currently offer this. Most of the Gold award was delivered through an Open Centre based at Guisborough Youth Centre, where any students, apprentices, or young adults aged 16 to 25 could attend training, hundreds achieved their Gold award.

All the centre needs from this council is the licence fee of £1,600 per year. The expertise and equipment are already in place, Without this small amount, we are precluding our young people the chance to complete the three awards and fulfil their potential at such a vital junction in their life.

Would the Cabinet Lead please agree to sit down with the organiser and explore a last minute rescue scenario, including finding a mere £1600 per year for our adventurous and aspirational young people to carry on providing an Open Centre for the DoE Gold Award scheme?"

Question 9: Question from Councillor Joy to Councillor Richardson, Cabinet Member for Climate and Culture:

"Given the ongoing concerns surrounding the environmental and health impacts of constructing a new incinerator in our Borough to burn residual waste can the Cabinet Member for Environment please outline what specific steps have been taken to investigate viable alternatives such as securing short term contracts with existing facilities like Haverton Hill or Port Clarence to avoid committing to a costly and risky long-term project and help elected members arrive at an informed and rational decision."

Question 10: Question from Councillor Learoyd to Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council:

"This Borough Council spends £3M on Councillors every three years. There are 59 Councillors for only 137000 people.

Tees Valley Combined Authority is formed of five Borough Councils. It's not always clear which level of council performs which function. The five boroughs in the Tees Valley area contain 100 wards, with a total of 247 Councillors for a combined population of 676,000.

I fail to see why we need so many layers of government and councillors, especially when we throw in the five Parish Councils in this borough.

In 2014, I voted against the Tees Valley Combined Authority's creation. It was clear it would become another layer of government with accountability issues.

The abolition of the Cleveland County Council in 1995, a Council that had served us well, through a process unfortunately driven by power hungry fiefdom searchers, has proven a mistake. They should have abolished the district councils instead.

An irrational conglomerate of wards, Redcar and Cleveland has served as little more than an organisation that has partly denied Middlesbrough its city status - Irish origins and Roman Catholic cathedral issues aside - by taking a chunk of Middlesbrough out of the "city" council and partnering it with abstract parts of North Yorkshire.

It's clear, as Redcar and Cleveland lurches from one financial disaster to the next, it is and always was too small to be a stand alone local authority. It just doesn't have the economy of scale to consistently attract talent, cut good deals with providers, and ultimately serve its population.

In six years, over two terms a decade apart, I have never heard a resident say they identify with Redcar and Cleveland. I could name 1000s who would like to see the authority abolished.

While I am a Yorkshireman who is inclined to think Marske-by-the-Sea needs returning to North Yorkshire, it's likely time for the leader to write to the appropriate Secretary of State to urge them to merge all Tees Valley local authorities. It would increase scrutiny and democratise the mayoral authority, two characteristics it has chronically lacked since its inception. We have a duty to be humble in positions of power. Staff will be transferred but Councillors won't always be returned by new boundaries.

The current situation at Redcar and Cleveland is serving very few.

As such I am requesting that the Leader introduce a full debate on the future of Redcar and Cleveland so we can fully and rationally debate Councillor numbers, and the future of this Council and as such, if we agree that engagement with the Secretary of State to draw the curtain on this Borough Council should be committed to."

Question 11: Question from Councillor Learoyd to Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council:

"Under the previous administration a "climate emergency" was declared by Redcar and Cleveland. A target of Net Zero of 2030 was set.

Since then the 400000 tonne carbon emitting Wilton 11 incinerator was opened, cynically under the same greenwashing previous administration, and you as the 'new' leader are now a supporter of the additional 450000 tonne carbon emitting TVERF Grangetown Incinerator.

The contract for the latter will run for 30 years.

Redcar and Cleveland, unless you take responsibility for your actions in allowing these incinerators, will never hit its 2030 carbon net zero target.

So, I am asking you to either oppose the incinerators with me or announce to the public that you have scrapped the 2030 carbon zero deadline and do not share the climate aspirations of your own political party."

Question 12: Question from Councillor Learoyd to Councillor Suthers, Cabinet Member for Children:

“Last half-term I was made aware of parents receiving warnings off local schools. In one case a child had an attendance of 94.9% for the half-term, after the school sent the child home for two days due to being ill at school. It was the school policy that children should stay off school for two days if ill at school.

So hitting the 95% attendance figure was impossible for the child as 2 days in the half-term was over 5%. An absence completely due to the policies of the school and the government.

This is one personal story, but there are 100s of others every half-term. Your child is ill but as a parent you feel compelled to send them to school, due to the authoritarian rules around state school attendance.

Is the Cabinet member aware of the draconian rules around school attendance and their implications on infection in the wider community and the unnecessary pressure being put on responsible parents?”