

Questions to Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs

The following is an answer to the question submitted by Councillor Andy McGuinness, which was marked “to follow” on the answers list sent to Members last week.

(A) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

‘What assessment will be undertaken by officers of the negative consequences on the Council of a “lame duck Government” caused by the resignation of Boris Johnson?’

Answer (Councillor Sharon Taylor):

Thank you for the question Cllr MacGuinness, and I am sure you would agree with me that we have seen some of the most extraordinary political times in Westminster in the last few weeks, culminating in what amounts to a zombie government led by a Prime Minister who is attempting in his last few weeks clinging on in Downing Street to try to persuade the public of his record of delivery and his credibility, the same record and credibility that he could not even persuade his own side to support. The scenes of a Chancellor of the Exchequer appointed one day and calling for the PMs resignation the next were unprecedented.

The fact is though that to tackle the very difficult national challenges that we face; the cost of living crisis, the Covid recovery period, war on mainland Europe, climate change and dealing with the fact that Brexit was undertaken with no plan for a post-Brexit economy, we need a competent, efficient and effective government dedicated not to the internal wranglings of the Conservative Party but to the future of our country.

Local councils are, as we always do, getting on with the job. But we are fettered by the fact that we have neither the powers or the funding to do what we know would be in the interests of our community. The perfect example of that is climate change, we know it will take over £200million for the decarbonisation of our council homes, that can only come from government as we just don’t have the quantum of funding which would enable such a programme. So we urgently need a fair and proper funding package for Councils who are on the frontline dealing with all the current challenges our community faces.

This Council has had extensive experience in responding to complex challenges during the last few years including matters such as the UK’s exit from the European Union, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the impacts arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Alongside responding to ongoing challenges like regenerating our town centre, building more social and affordable homes and addressing climate change, the Council is also considering how it can best support residents and businesses through the cost of living crisis. Linked to that

we are striving to remain financially resilient after a decade a of austerity during which the Government has reduced our funding by over £11m.

There are several steps we take when dealing with uncertainty including engaging with our sector partners in the Local Government Association and District Councils Network who, at national level, are well placed to lobby and advocate for the needs of local authorities with Government officials through to us undertaking local assessments of risk and using established mechanisms such as our budget review cycle to ensure Members are appraised of any anticipated resulting impacts.

We will continue to do all we can to support our community here in Stevenage but what we really need is a new government and while I am a fan of recycling generally, I don't think those responsible for the dreadful situation we are in now but just with a new captain will cut it. Lets have a general election and start to rebuild the future our country deserves.