

Written responses to supplementary questions – 17 July 2024 Council meeting

A. Supplementary question from Councillor Povolotsky to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Supplementary question

Chair - does the Leader of this administration and majority group agree that as the Leader of the council she should be available to listen to residents views whether they are in alignment or not with this councils position, when requested to meet and discuss issues that are important to them - and if so, then my question remains, as GARD represents a significant group of residents from the Vale, when will the leader agree to a meeting to listen to their concerns, objections, scientific and technical evaluations, or assign this to the relevant cabinet member ?

Written response

It's important to remember that this council has no decision-making role on SESRO, which is why I remain committed to seeking a meeting with the relevant Secretary of State. Of course, as members we should listen to the views of all our residents, including both supporters and opponents of SESRO, and to encourage everyone to make their views heard by the relevant organisations.

GARD is a specific group with a set aim; the group does not speak for residents in general and does not need to take account of any views or technical analysis other than its own. As the Leader of the council, I cannot meet with one group, representing at best the views of a subset of residents, without meeting all other groups that may have a view on SESRO and related matters. I would encourage GARD to continue to make representations to the appropriate bodies, at the appropriate times, as I would any other group, local councillor, or individual resident.

D. Supplementary Question from Councillor Patel to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council from Councillor Patel

Supplementary question

I thank the Leader for the response and thank her for offering to forward the letter from the new Secretary of State. I completely appreciate manifesto promises of late have meant very little. The Labour Government today announced the English Devolution Bill in the King's Speech, this does give us something more concrete to work with and does the Leader have a viewpoint on how this will impact our district, specifically the passage about new powers to local leaders to produce Local Growth Plans?

Written response

The King's Speech emphasised the Government's mission and messaging on economic growth. Whilst Local Growth Plans (LGPs) were confirmed as being a

statutory requirement for Metro Mayors and Combined Authorities, it is not yet clear whether LGPs will become a requirement for district councils in two tier areas.

Should a Local Growth Plan be required, I am confident that council officers have the necessary skills to develop a LGP and are already fully conversant with local needs and priority issues. This, when linked to the clear vision and strategic priorities set by my cabinet and council, means that we can be confident that Vale would be well placed to not only deliver a LGP, but monitor its impact and effectiveness.

More widely, I remain hopeful that any devolution proposals will not impact the adoption of the Joint Local Plan (JLP) on its current timetable, but with proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and planning in a wider sense being outlined for change by Government, there remains a potential risk, and I will therefore be writing to government to outline Vale's excellent record in housing delivery and highlighting the progress being made with the Joint Local Plan.

E. Supplementary question from Councillor Dewhurst Cllr Dewhurst to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Supplementary question

Why wasn't the information in respect of the requirement for an Integrated Care Board approved business case passed to elected representatives and parish councils sooner?

Written response

As all councillors will be aware, there is duty placed on every public sector body to maximise value for money.

Therefore, whilst it is not always called a business case, all NHS related expenditure on the delivery of new health care facilities is subject to a broadly similar process although that is an internal matter for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), rather than the Vale.

The ICB completed its internal process regarding the funding aspects in this case during January of this year, and this information was subsequently shared by our officers, with all members in February 2024 once confirmed to us. It has also been included on the BOB ICB website page specifically relating to GWP provision since February.