

Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 28 November 2024

Question No. (in order of receipt)	Questioner	Respondent	Question
1.	Leigh TAYLOR	Councillor McCOLLUM	<p>Cllr McCollom, at September’s council meeting when Cllr Culley asked you “What [attire/dress] wouldn’t be allowed at the council’s Family Friendly Pride events?”</p> <p>you said,</p> <p>‘Pride is for everyone to express themselves...’</p> <p>and you ‘couldn’t define limits’</p> <p>This view is NOT shared by Darlington residents. You might not know that because the Council’s Facebook pages remove unwanted comments and block people.</p> <p>On Saturday 5th October, I stood on High Row, in Cockerton and in Heighington and asked adults what they thought of two particular Pride photos (on the council’s Facebook pages of the men in the penis sheath and pup mask.)</p> <p>Of the 78 adults who had time to talk:</p> <p>96% said the penis sheath outfit was inappropriate</p> <p>97.4% said the BDSM mask was inappropriate</p> <p>98.7% said posting the council should NOT have posted those photos on Facebook</p> <p>100% said a resident SHOULD be able to ask questions about them and raise safeguarding concerns at a council meeting.</p> <p>Some said they thought it was always like that so it’s why they don’t attend.</p> <p>One man, who told me he was gay, said, “This shows the council don’t understand me. They think drag queens</p>

			<p>and idiots like that [he was referring to the men in those photos] are the LGB community”. “If they are” he said, “they don’t represent me.”</p> <p>Most asked why didn’t council staff intervene and ask them to cover up and/ or remove the mask. They thought, surely the council impose limits, for the good of everyone, on people’s behaviour. Residents need to know the council understands what is family-friendly and what is not.</p> <p>My survey shows, rather than fostering good relations, the council is in danger of failing in its equality duty, and because you seem to be endorsing exhibitionism, its duty of care. At other family friendly events those outfits don’t appear - there’s obviously no need for them. Giving a certain event a ‘pass’ is the opposite of equality, diversity and inclusion, and obviously common-sense safeguarding.</p> <p>Will you commit the council to a change for 2025 with the preparation of a comprehensive risk assessment that acknowledges this might occur again and train the council staff so</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a safeguarding approach is the priority</li> <li>• attendees know what IS appropriate at a family friendly event</li> <li>• and if they don’t, organise contingency plans for your staff to help them on the day</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b></p>	<p>Dorothy LONG</p>	<p>Councillor McCOLLOM</p>	<p>For 35 years until 2015 I was a Member of this Council. My question concerns the sculpture, ‘Train’ sited at Morton Park and is directed to Cllr. Libby McCollom.</p> <p>What measures will the Council take to ensure the proper maintenance of the sculpture ‘Train’ and the site on which it stands, urgently, in the short term and sustainably in the future?</p> <p>The sculpture, sometimes known as the Brick Train was completed in 1997. It was designed by David Mach, an artist with an international reputation, built by expert bricklayers from Shepherds Construction, in partnership with local businesses, particularly Morrisons who donated the land. It was financed largely by the National Lottery as part of Visual Arts Year 1976, and facilitated and partly funded by Darlington Borough Council.</p> <p>Morrisons maintained the site until the land was sold in 2022. Since then it appears that no ground</p>

			<p>maintenance has been done. It is a well known phenomenon, that once a site or a structure shows signs of neglect, deterioration quickly sets in. This is exactly what has happened, the approaches to the sculpture are littered and overgrown and the condition of the structure itself is shameful. Weeds are growing from it, grass and moss threaten the brickwork and it is now crudely disfigured by graffiti in white paint featuring adolescent imagery and use of the F word.</p> <p>The Council brought this prestigious piece of public art to Darlington, it was built with public money and is an asset to the Borough. The image of 'Train' was used extensively in promotional literature and was a spur to economic regeneration. It could be an asset again. In the context of the 200th Anniversary of the Stockton Darlington Railway it is a symbol of our engineering expertise in the past but also Darlington's energy and hope for the future.</p> <p>It is crucial therefore that partnerships be fostered with new owners, with businesses, with the voluntary sector and people in the community who value it as I do so that it is never again neglected as it is today.</p>
<p><b>3.</b></p>	<p>Michael WALKER</p>	<p>Councillor GARNER</p>	<p>In answer to a question at the last council meeting, Cllr Riley, the previous Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, mentioned the Household Support Fund as an avenue for pensioners who are freezing this winter to go down for support. The 8th October online version of The Northern Echo also reported on a plan to help residents who have had their winter fuel allowance cruelly ripped away from them by our Labour MP and the Labour government. Finally, at the end of November, the fund is being advertised to residents to apply for.</p> <p>Last week, we experienced a period of freezing weather when this fund was not available. The delay in the Labour government, Labour MP and council putting this scheme in operation meant many elderly people shivered through the last week. The fund is now being advertised, however no member of the public can access it if they have any savings. The elderly, who are on fixed incomes and often put money away in a savings account each week to pay for Christmas gifts for their grandchildren, will be refused this fund. That means the Labour council and Labour MP are forcing the elderly in Darlington to choose between buying a Christmas gift for their beloved grandchildren or heating their home. I wonder how many Labour and Liberal</p>

			<p>Democrat councillors thought that they would be defending such a wicked decision when they ran for office.</p> <p>The Labour government has asked local councils to clean up their mess, and in doing so we now have pensioners being discriminated against because they put money aside for their grandkids' Christmas presents. My question to you is will you show that Darlington Labour cares about people and allow the elderly who have put money aside to access the fund?</p>
4.	David RIVERS	Councillor HARKER	<p>At a previous council meeting the council refused to allow a member of the public to ask a question to council. I represent a group of residents who are concerned that proposed changes to the Council Procedure Rules mean there will be more cases of the council silencing members of the public. The change from "The Assistant Director Law and Governance may reject a question if it is defamatory, frivolous or offensive" to "is defamatory (or potentially so)" would allow Darlington Borough Council to silence even more. Will you support our cause to make Darlington Borough Council a free speech council?</p>
5.	Mandip Singh BAINS	Councillor GARNER	<p>In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of homes being converted into Houses in Multiple Occupation, known as HMOs. These HMOs can be dangerous; you are six times more likely to die in a fire if you live in a HMO compared to a single family house. You are 16 times more at risk of fatal injury if you live in an HMO which is 3 or more storeys high. It has been found that the rate of crime and anti-social behaviour rises with an increase in the number of HMOs in the area. When the council allows for the alteration of a 3 bedroom house which was intended for one household into a 5 bedroom HMO there appears to be no consideration made to the strain placed on local services, such as access to local health facilities, transport and even green spaces. Alongside this HMOs can cause problems for local communities with an increase in anti-social behaviour, increased noise levels, parking difficulties, pressure on local facilities, and family homes being replaced.</p> <p>Will the council continue with their decision to increase the number of licences issued for HMOs or will they listen to the concerns of local residents and place a halt on the expansion in Darlington?</p>
6.	Gavin DOBSON (unable to	Councillor McEWAN	<p>The cost of Darlington becoming Net Zero by 2040 will cost £230,000,000. Since the current Labour administration took control of Darlington we have seen footfall in the town centre drop and businesses close, due in no small part to your party's decision to stop free parking. The Northern Echo described this decision as</p>

	attend – written response to be provided).		the decline of the town. We have recently heard the news that Vauxhall in Luton will be closing their doors due to the Labour government’s policy to pursue harmful net zero policies. Darlington will not be unaffected, when the chancellor’s tax rises come in we will see more businesses struggling due to Labour’s cost of living crisis, rising energy prices and Labour’s tax on jobs, the national insurance rise. We know this will happen as real economists, not the fake one who holds the post of chancellor, has told us it will happen. Please can you confirm that you will scrap Darlington’s ridiculous idea to get to net zero ten years early and use the money saved to bring back free parking and help the people of this town.
7.	Miss. Angela ALLAN	Councillor GARNER	<p>It has been nearly three months since the Labour government voted to means test the Winter Fuel Allowance (“WFA”).</p> <p>Shortly after the WFA vote we had the jarring revelation of the “gifts and freebies” given to the Prime Minister (“PM”) and members of the cabinet. We are all now familiar with the Taylor Swift tickets costing £4k, Doncaster Races tickets costing £2k. Another way of thinking is that the sum of the ticket costs equates to thirty WFA payments.</p> <p>It is the end of November and everyone who needs to heat their home should be able to do so without fear or anxiety. Energy bills are increasing in January therefore pensioners need to have funds available to them now. It is imperative that those eligible for Pension Credit or are on a low income are identified swiftly.</p> <p>At the last Council meeting I raised my concerns that the pensioners in Darlington would suffer as a result of this change in eligibility to the WFA. An outline of the support available by the Council and voluntary agencies was given in response to my question at that meeting.</p> <p>Can the Council now report on progress made to date in ensuring that no pensioner will suffer fuel poverty and confirm the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how many households have been identified as being eligible for Pension Credit to date</li> <li>- of those eligible how many claims have been made</li> <li>- how many claims have been successful.</li> </ul>

			<p>- of those not eligible for Pension Credit how many have been identified as low income and been offered financial support</p> <p>Since the last Council meeting Darlington has been awarded a Household Support Fund of almost £ 914k to period ending 31.03.25.</p> <p>Will part of the Household Support Fund be ring fenced to be allocated to pensioners? And if so what proportion?</p>
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