

Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 27 March 2025

(Please note that the questions outlined below are reproduced as they have been submitted by those individuals or groups seeking to ask a question, and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Council)

Question No.	Question received from	Respondent	Question
1.	Kevin BRACK	Councillor HARKER	"The People of Darlington Borough Council Deserves better, we had Labour wanting to close the library and then the Tories with the Darlington plan which they were going to change when they got into power, which they never did. Sheffield City Council and Folkestone & Hythe District Council have moved away from leader and cabinet system to that of committee stye governance, considering the recent discussions around improving the effectiveness and inclusivity of our local governance, would you support a motion to transition Darlington Borough Council from the current leader and cabinet model to a committee style of governance? This change aims to enhance participation from all councillors, increase transparency and accountability, and ensure better representation of our community's interests. Given the potential benefits for democracy within our council, how do you view this proposal, and what steps would you recommend to explore or implement this governance reform?"
2.	Michael WALKER	Councillor HARKER	At a previous council meeting, a resident shouted from the audience their desperate concern over people freezing in their homes due to the disastrous policies of the Labour Party. Instead of showing compassion, Cllr McEwan asked if the member of the public, a person who pays for your allowances, could be removed from the room. The current code of conduct states that councillors should treat all persons with respect and that public resources are used prudently in accordance with the local authority's requirements and in the public interest. Please explain to me what initiatives you have put in place to ensure councillors follow the code of conduct.
3.	Miriam McGEARY	Councillor WALLIS	"Why are systemic failure, malpractice and social injustice covered up as routine practice . Why is faulty and outdated oversight still operational in today's modern society?"
4.	Leigh TAYLOR	Councillor	Cllr McCollom, in September 2024 my question to you regarding events and safeguarding was disallowed.

		McCULLOM	<p>When I raised similar issues in November, you refused to answer my second question orally (in red below). You replied: 'Mrs Taylor I will get back to you with a written response. At the moment I feel unable to answer your question fully because of your equivocation of sexual offences and Pride, an LGBTQ+ celebration, I find personally very offensive.'" Despite three polite requests, from me and then Mr Swinhoe, you still have not responded.</p> <p>In the intervening period we have seen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Church of England set up a series of new safeguarding measures• the Government state its commitment to fully implement the reforms outlined in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse report (2022) with a specific emphasis on multi-agency working and• Hazell Dean, Patron of Pride in Surrey, issue a statement about the convictions of Stephen Ireland and David Sutton: "These individuals "hid in plain sight" using charities, businesses, organisations and Pride as a distraction from their disgusting activities." <p>Countless inquiries and reports into child sex abuse have pointed to lost opportunities to act on whistleblowers reports and to stop abuse with many citing reasons such as political correctness, identity sensitivities and not wanting to 'rock the establishment boat'. Being offended won't safeguard children from paedophiles. Safeguarding policies and procedures are supposed to deal with the few in order to protect the many.</p> <p>It may be that you have forgotten to reply.</p> <p>What assurances can you give residents that the council's Events Management Team employ active measures to prevent abusers, and suspected abusers, from being involved in any Darlington events, and having access to children and vulnerable adults, and how confident are you on a scale of 1-10 that they are sufficient?</p> <p>Pride in Surrey - Statement from Pride in Surrey. In... Facebook</p> <p>In November</p>
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5.	Kevin GRAINGER	Councillor McCOLLUM	"Will the Councillor assure me the increase on Council tax will be spent on services".
6.	Ren BELL	Councillor GARNER	<p>"This month the ██████ charity Sex Matters got involved in the Melanie Newman vs Met Police case, managing to get the rule 49 anonymity request removed, opening the door to potentially reveal the identities of a number of trans employees and pro trans allies within the met police should this tactic be repeated.</p> <p>This is a direct response to the tactics used in the Bethany Hutchinson vs Darlington NHS Trust case, where the trans woman in question had her anonymity request turned down.</p> <p>In a political climate where hate crimes against trans people are raising at an astonishing rate, and our community faces near constant harassment online and in person, these anonymity requests allow us access to the legal systems without fear of repercussion. This new tactic is designed to intimidate trans people away from accessing legal systems for fear of their safety.</p> <p>What does this council intend to do to ensure marginalised people have full and equal access to the legal systems in place to protect them, and how do they intend to protect them going forward when the courts fail to do so?"</p>
7.	Skerningham Woodland Action Group	Councillor McEWAN	Many of our members have witnessed the felling of numerous trees and the extensive excavation of vegetation along the banks of the River Skerne at Burdon Gardens, located off Bishopton Lane. This area is where a proposed Temporary Skerningham garden village phase 1 construction traffic haul will cross the river.

			<p>When we informed the council about this incident before a planning application was submitted, we were informed that it was merely routine farmland maintenance carried out by the new landowner, (the Skerningham developer).</p> <p>At one point, a large digger slipped or entered the Skerne, necessitating the call for another large piece of machinery to dig the riverbank and extract the digger. This area is situated in a flood zone 3, and removing trees, vegetation, and damaging the riverbanks will not mitigate the flooding risks in that area.</p> <p>Our question is, given the actions we have witnessed at Burdon Gardens by the Skerningham developer is this a taste of future developments before or after the garden village planning applications have been determined by the council's planning committee? Or, can you and planning officers assure us that the council will effectively manage this developer, who do not have a good track record when it comes to environmental issues on land they develop.</p>
8.	Peter PLANT	Councillor McEWAN	<p>"I would like to ask about what is happening at Skerningham. It appears that work is being carried out to clear (living, not dead as has been implied) trees along a potential route of the haul road between Bishopton and Barmpton Lanes, despite no planning permission being granted for this. The Council were made aware of this, and investigated, but now describe it as 'routine land maintenance work' which does not require planning permission, when it clearly is not. People don't pre-emptively clear the route of a road for 'routine maintenance' reasons. Who is making this decision not to challenge the landowners on this, and why?"</p>