

Questions submitted on Notice for the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 19 June 2025

Question No.	Question received from	Respondent	Question
1.	Michael WALKER	Councillor HARKER	<p><i>'Given the clear concern that Darlington Borough Council is running scared of scrutiny, as highlighted in recent criticism over the Council's appalling scrutiny restructure, the decision to hold an extraordinary meeting is very welcome. The public rightly deserve answers — especially as some residents have waited over a year for a response from the Leader of the Council.</i></p> <p><i>In light of tonight's motion recognising the vital role that community and sports groups play in improving health, reducing crime, and fostering social cohesion, can the Leader explain why Skerne Park Community Partnership has been forced to vacate its base at the Coleridge Centre — effectively putting on hold key community engagement activities like boxing, coding, and self-defence classes?</i></p> <p><i>As I'm sure you're aware, these activities can't be organised from someone's living room. What action is the Council taking to ensure that grassroots groups like this — which so clearly support the Physical Activity Strategy and wider wellbeing objectives — are properly supported, not pushed out and residents of our town are helped?'</i></p>
2.	Leigh TAYLOR	Councillor ROCHE	<p><i>"Cllr Roche, you recently pointed out that 'Physical activity is critical for promoting good health. It improves wellbeing and the number of years that people can live healthily.'. Therefore, knowing that a motion has been presented to support the council and residents to achieve this is great to hear.</i></p> <p><i>One of the most popular activities in the UK is swimming and council pools are often the most accessible venues. There is however an elephant in the room – the 'changing village'. Unfortunately, mixed sex 'village' cubicles mean that the dignity, privacy and safety of women and children is potentially compromised. This is not my opinion; it is based on a growing body of evidence.</i></p> <p><i>In 2018, a Sunday Times FOI investigation found there were '134 complaints of changing room sexual assaults, voyeurism and harassment in 2017-2018: 120 (nearly 90%) occurred in mixed facilities. Just 14 were in single sex changing areas.</i></p>

A WRN 2024 report catalogued press reports which confirm that women and girls are at risk in village-style changing areas: 'In Swansea, a 27-year-old male was convicted of voyeurism in a communal village-style changing area at the LC Waterpark. He was charged with 'observing a private act for sexual gratification' after he had followed a 15-year-old girl into the changing rooms and filmed her by putting his phone under the partition wall of the adjoining cubicle. Similar incidents have occurred all over the country, e.g. Bakewell, Bicester, Leicester, and a particularly nasty case occurred at pools across London and the Southwest of England where two men colluded to photograph at least 6,000 victims, including children.'

The scale of this issue has been further illustrated by Swim England, who in February 2025, held an extraordinary emergency safeguarding meeting because cases of voyeurism and using mobile phones to photograph women and girls changing at swim competitions have doubled. In a statement at the safeguarding meeting, Swim England said it "strongly recommended" that swimming organisations engaged with local pool providers to encourage them to create "simple barrier systems" to allow mixed changing villages to have separate changing areas for either sex.

Cllr Roche, to help the council address the 'Active Environments' issue of 'Creating and protecting the spaces that make it easier to be active', the changing rooms offer needs to change. The Dolphin Centre's dry change is already single sex - what is the explanation for this and why this isn't also the case with the wet change for pool users? "

Notes:

[1]

<https://democracy.darlington.gov.uk/documents/s24659/Item%20No.%204%20-%20Physical%20Activity%20Strategy%20-%20Appendix%201.pdf>

[2] (Sunday Times article <https://archive.ph/evO4g>)

[3] p9 Leisure Centres: Putting Women and Girls at Risk

https://a86851fb-c226-400d-9bf4-401a61daaa40.usrfiles.com/ugd/a86851_0f9e0eeec3b54ff18327bfce8f5e6f52.pdf

[4] Voyeurs target female athletes at swimming competitions. Women say they are considering leaving the sport after leaked Swim England report shows 'significant increase' in incidents. The Times 31/03/2025

<https://archive.ph/Ge7sd#selection-1715.0-1715.283>

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