

CLLR HELEN HARVEY SPEECH IN SUPPORT OF MOTION TO MOVE TO COMMITTEE SYSTEM GIVEN AT SPELTHORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL VIRTUAL FULL COUNCIL MEETING 30TH JULY 2020

MOTION

Proposed by Cllr H Harvey and seconded by Cllr O Rybinski

“This Council resolves to implement a change in decision-making governance arrangements, comprising the cessation of the current Leader and Cabinet model of governance and the implementation of a Full Committee model of governance. This is to be developed during 2020 with a view to the arrangements taking effect at the earliest opportunity, but no later than the commencement of the next Council Municipal Year in May 2021, subject to a legally and constitutionally robust process. The changes are to be led by the Monitoring Officer and the Members Code of Conduct committee and agreed by the Council.”

I BLAME BREXIT:

Fellow Members and esteemed colleagues – I blame Brexit!

If it wasn't for Brexit I doubt we would be here today with me proposing a motion to fundamentally change the governance model of Spelthorne Borough Council.

The British electorate voted for Brexit – indeed 62% did in Spelthorne. But then the establishment and many in the “political class” thought they knew better and did all they could to frustrate, undermine, and sought to prevent Brexit.

So, our electorate rebelled, and rightly so, at their first opportunity – the local borough elections and the Conservatives lost seats across Surrey though I might add with Conservatives getting a better result here in Spelthorne than anywhere else in Surrey. The message was clear – get Brexit done!

So many councils have found themselves in ‘no overall control’ and have looked to the committee system model as a way to resolve how to run their councils going forwards.

Now -Spelthorne Conservatives have also lost majority control.

CONSERVATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT THIS MOTION:

I have of course every anticipation that the Conservative Group will support this motion – having heard the policy speech given by the new incoming leader and his deputy, I was convinced that they were going to be proposing their own motion to move to a committee system. Indeed, I was left believing I was in a race and so I moved fairly promptly to get the motion in – some 4 weeks ago.

A BIT OF HISTORY:

2000 Local Government Act – introduced by Tony Blair’s government abolished the committee system for all but the smallest authorities.

In 2011 introduction of the Localism Act made the committee system available again to all English councils.

This model best fits councils where there is no overall control and has been readapted where such circumstances prevail.

A STRONG LEADER MODEL:

A strong leader model is absolutely what is needed when things need sorting out, and in particular when a council is facing a dire situation with its finances, as we were a few years ago, but once things are on an even keel, it is perhaps not the best model going forwards as the priorities of the council change. Indeed it can be a dangerous if the leader is not of sufficient calibre.

What residents want ultimately is a well-run and stable Council.

We now have a significant assets portfolio of commercial properties and are building our residential portfolio both of which now require a management model that can carefully and prudently nurture and manage this significant asset into the future, in trust for our residents.

I believe the committee system is better placed to deliver this.

MY MOTIVATION FOR BRINGING THIS MOTION:

Some may doubt my motives in bringing such a bold motion to council. The fact is I genuinely believe this is the right course for this Council at this time and I will not shy away from promoting what I believe to be the right thing.

I am somewhat of a detailed person and as such have carried out significant research and consulted broadly regarding the options for the Borough's governance model and it is only following this, that I have concluded that the best way forwards for this council is the introduction of a full committee system.

BENEFITS:

There are clearly recognised benefits of governing via committees (alongside of course some of the downsides), we should see: -

1. Improved cooperation and cross-party motivation
2. Pooling of opinions and ideas and different approaches to problem solving
3. Wider representation
4. Dispersal of power and a wider decision-making process, and accountability allows Cllrs chance to skill up
5. Better continuity of membership
6. Better chances that a recommendation will be accepted
7. Better chances of utilising the full knowledge base of all elected councillors

ASKING FOR SUPPORT OF GREENS:

To my esteemed colleagues in the Green party – I believe that your Green aspirations can be more readily realised and be translated into actual policies; which are adapted if we adopt the committee system and I hope that you wish to take up this opportunity and support this motion.

TIMESCALES

The motion includes clear timescales which is important to provide officers with the direction within which to work and will ensure the new governance model is put into place by the next municipal year commencing May 2021.

If we leave it to Cllrs Boughtflower's and Mclroy's motion – which is clearly a filibuster and a sabotaging -attempt, then it is clear that his intention is to kick any potential change in governance into the long grass.

THE NEW REALITY

I believe all elected members in this virtual “chamber” need to recognise and accept the new reality

1. We are still dealing with the Covid-19 and the impact will be felt by our residents and the council for years to come. Our residents expect us to work responsibly and collaboratively to manage the fallout.
2. There is no longer a working Conservative Majority run council and consequently there needs to be a significant change to reflect these dynamics.
3. This is a once in a political cycle golden opportunity to truly revitalise democracy in Spelthorne, to reflect the new political reality and **also restore stability;**

NB. I intended to conclude with the following final paragraph, but was cut off before I could finish:

*I believe that the introduction of the full committee system of governance, in which all parties and members can contribute and participate to the running of the council, is the best way to embrace the opportunities and resolve the issues which have arisen following the conservatives having haemorrhaged 26% of their members, and consequently losing control of Spelthorne Council,
And I ask Cllrs to put aside their differences and join together in supporting this motion.*