

Dear Councillor,

I've yet again received the local times through the door only to discover there was a council consultation on the joint operation with Capita and Re Ltd that no one knows about and that it is over. So I've written in to you as lead councillor and copied it to the department.

From what I can see Capita responds very quickly to each and every councillor who makes direct contact or has an issue but everything coming from the public is fielded away from a specific member of staff, you can never speak to them. If you email in you eventually get an answer but if the matter is on going you rarely get a second response. It seems the hope is that you will give up.

Unfortunately the arrangement with Capita appears to operate on the typical contract system where they make their money by what they don't do. When pulled up they are professional, they apologise and say they must do better, something else goes downwards they apologise again, we had staff leaving etc. and so the cycle goes on. In the meantime they make money above and beyond their contract.

I have had lots of connections with various department of the council over the years having been involved as an assistant head teacher with maintenance of a school site . I know the phone number off by heart.

I walk a lot locally and when I notice a problem all be it a car dumped in the local wreck, a gas smell or a water leak I have always phoned it in as I walk. Surprisingly I often come across gas leaks. More frequently I come across pavement or road potholes. The later I have now stopped bothering to phone in or put on "Fix my street." Before Capita you could absolutely rely on the council to take action, if you phoned something in you could be certain it would be done. Now more often than not nothing happens. It's always been hassle to phone in with all the messages to get passed before you get to a receptionist, with little response it's just not worth the effort.

Twice I reported a damaged paving stone. No more than 50 meters from the very busy main entrance from a primary school. A lorry had obviously been over it. One paving was 50mm+ below the other, probably the worst I have ever seen. The feedback I got was that it was not serious enough to be dealt with. Either it was not even looked at or there is some amazingly bad judgement. I contacted again. Nothing happened. I raised it with one of the commissioners in a residents meeting when a rep from Capita was present and finally it was repaired. Members of the public are simply not going to bother though a councillor tells me it always happens when he reports it!

I run the Neighbourhood Watch which has meant I have some matters that connect with the council. I've had contacts with the school travel officer(Capita) about setting up a walk to school route. Almost impossible to get a name. Impossible to get a direct phone number. A couple of emails and arrangements made then you hear nothing. Absolutely impossible to make progress.

I've actually measured the width of the road to check to see if it's possible to put a traffic island at the top end. As part of the walk to school scheme we hoped to get a traffic island installed to improve safety and deal with some terrible driving. I asked the school travel officer to follow it up for me. After reminders she came back saying it needed to go through engineering. Eventually I was advised to email it in. I received an acknowledgement then nothing. I phoned after weeks and it was put through again. Nothing has happened and I'm still waiting. Absolutely typical.

We wanted to widen our drive since the grass verge was being left in a terrible muddy mess with white delivery vans. I completed the forms. I sent drawings and photos to make absolutely sure nothing could go wrong and still it was marked out in the wrong and most obviously farcically stupid way. Finally contractors came and left it incomplete. It ended with me getting hold over the overseer encouraging him to sort it. Over and above land registry connections neighbours could not believe the cost neither could we!

A neighbour decided to follow our approach. They had had a tree in front of their house which had died and been removed. They applied and to their amazement they were told that a replacement tree was due to be planted and they would have to pay an additional £125 pounds to have it removed. Again farcical, they have given up.

The owner of a house at the bottom of the road, [REDACTED] applied for and got approval for a side and rear extension. Approval stated very clearly, approval granted based on accurate drawings being provided. Finishes to match existing. Drawings provided were incorrectly indicating an existing brick/ block extension was to be removed and rebuilt up to the pavement line. There is nothing similar locally and clearly would not match. Google street scene clearly shows the existing construction was a rickety lean to structure with corrugated plastic roofing inside a fence not a brick construction. It was built and the gutter now over hangs the pavement which is not permitted. Finishes don't match. A further extension has been put up without planning permission as part of the same works. Only after my contacting a councillor has action been taken. The owner has been invited to apply for retrospective planning permission. What has happened about the incorrect drawing supplied with the initial application? What is happening about the over hanging gutters. The fact that the owner decided to throw up an additional extension over a weekend whilst workers were on site without planning permission when he obviously knows it is needed speaks volumes. The fact that he has not applied for permission to split the house into flats yet has installed separate boilers for upper and lower floors and a neighbour who has viewed the inside said it is set out as separate flats also tells a story. It would seem experience tells the owner to have little respect for the authority's supervision.

Whilst we know you are free to appoint your own building control officer we had real concerns about safety on the above site. It was something from the third world. Deep foundations were left open overnight immediately against the pavement, scaffold had no kick boards when right over the pavement, dangerous supporting of beams not meeting building regs, men running as goods offloaded onto scaffold fell down. I emailed in twice with no response. I left messages. I finally spoke to a reception member from building control but I have little hope that a visit to the site was actually made. Emails to planning drew no response so eventually I raised it with the councillor in the road.

The fact is Capita seems to be a total disaster and you think it is absolutely impossible to make any headway with them, then you hear there is no money anyway. Anyone can see how dire the roads are particularly the bus routes. They have got very, very much worse.

My general impression is that we have a council environment committee who do not really see how bad the environment is. That's not to say councillors are not working hard. I know you all do. You need someone with vision and imagination running the environment committee not someone who focuses on money. Traffic has increased dramatically, the population is increasing but there are no changes and improvements made to take account. Capita's involvement is just the final nail. Go over the border though and you can find improvements and small schemes happening. It simply is not good enough.

Regards

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]