



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Bruce McDonald
Leader
Elmbridge Borough Council
Civic Centre
High Street
Esher
KT10 9SD

9 February 2024

Dear Cllr McDonald,

Thank you for your letter dated 6 February 2024, which was disappointing in every respect.

First, you say Elmbridge Borough Council acted “promptly and proportionately as soon as those problems had been identified” in November 2023. However, the original audit took place in June 2020. Action by Elmbridge Borough Council only followed three years later.

Second, you imply that the Conservative administration in 2018/2019 bears some responsibility for the crisis at our community centres. That is ludicrous, since the issues at the centres came to light during the 2020 audit. Liberal Democrat and Resident Association administrations have led Elmbridge Borough Council continuously from that point onwards.

Third, you state that “Health and Safety is the Council’s responsibility”, as somehow distinct from “whoever is in political control”. Residents will see this assertion as a further example of the abdication of responsibility by the Liberal Democrat administration.

Fourth, you say (in bold) “there is no plan to close Day Centres” and that concerns expressed by local residents are “specious”. However, you explicitly accept they have been identified in the Local Plan as targets for meeting housing need. The fact that there will be a consultation at a later date on how such sites will be redeveloped is irrelevant. Your inclusion of them in the Local Plan makes it very difficult to prevent a developer from successfully submitting a planning application. Ultimately, if the Council voted against such a planning application, the developer could win on appeal to the Planning Inspectorate, precisely because you have included the sites in your Local Plan.

Fifth, the ‘Three Stage Health and Safety Review Process’ agreed by Elmbridge Borough Council’s cabinet on 7 February 2024 cannot be considered independent. These stages consist of the Council’s Strategic Director, an internal audit within the Council, and Council Risk Management Partners. All three of these stages are either internal within the Council, or work with a previous partner. For a review to be considered independent, it must be conducted by a third party with no prior relationship with the Council. Therefore, I repeat my request that you commission a truly independent review with an external, independent partner, such as the Health and Safety Executive, or another independent body.

Sixth, I note you are replying on behalf of Cllr Coates (who my correspondence was addressed to), despite her writing to me to let me know she would be replying upon her return from holiday. Does this mean Cllr Coates has been relieved of control of community centres and, as Leader of the Council, you are taking direct control of the crisis afflicting them?

Finally, and most importantly, you have not answered my request for the June 2020 audit – the first time that concerns at our community centres were brought to the attention of officers and councillors – to be released. In light of this, I am today submitting a formal freedom of

information request for this audit to be made publicly available immediately. This is now imperative, in order to allay the concerns of residents that the crisis engulfing our community centres is now being compounded by your concealment of that report.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daini Reay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a stylized 'R'.

CC: Cllr Gill Coates, Portfolio Holder for Community Care