

16.02.2021

Bury's Labour Council Appoints £700/day Elections Advisor

Bury's Labour Council have appointed a '*Strategic Advisor*' to advise on the Local Election due to take place in May. This is being funded at the cost of £700 per day from the COVID Contain Grant the Council received from the Government. This is the same "short-term" advisor that was appointed in July 2020 to advise on the Council's Constitution. Now that work was completed, the executives at Bury Council have extended the contract to cover the local elections, costing taxpayers thousands per month in consultancy fees.

The government is continuing to support Councils to ensure that the running of the election in May is as smooth as possible and to ensure that they are planned effectively. Rather than spending this as other councils are doing, on improving processes and local democratic access to elections, Bury Council are instead using this money to pay an external Consultant who lives nearly one hundred miles away to give that advice online and to advise on how to prepare and run the election.

This is yet another example of Bury Council's continual reliance on expensive consultants at a time where budgets should be managed wisely, and we question if taxpayers are really getting good value for money.

Cllr. Nick Jones, Leader of Bury Conservatives:

"I question the costs of this appointment and at a loss that the Council does not believe they have the skills in house to deliver an election especially as there is an Elections Manager along with a Legal & Democratic Services team with years of experience. Bury Council have been running elections since the 1970's and 2021 will be no different, other than ensuring it is COVID safe.

"The Labour Council in Bury have a long history of spending hundreds of thousands in consultancy fees. I question the value for money aspect, I am intrigued at how the Labour Council can justify the spend especially from COVID grants. This is an extension to an already costly contract awarded in July 2020 which was funded from Council reserves.

"The average wage in Bury is £450 per week yet the Labour Council believe it is justifiable to spend £700 a day on an outside Consultant who lives nearly 100 miles away. The Consultant has been in Bury since July and the Conservative Group raised alarm bells then and were assured this was interim appointment and for a specific assignment in rewriting the constitution which was completed last year.

"The Labour Leader may believe this is acceptable but I certainly would not approve such a costly appointment from COVID grants, the fee should had been negotiated to a much lower rate if the Council so desperately needed support. Elections are going to be different this year and Bury is no different than any other town in the preparations that are needed. The Democratic Services team and Elections team do a brilliant job in ensuring elections run smoothly. This is a kick in the teeth the hardworking Council

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officers that the Labour Council have brought in a 'Strategic Advisor' to help run the election.

"I am truly amazed that the Labour Council consider this to be a morale way to use Governments COVID grants paying London style, private sector, consultant salaries. I am all for agile working and doing things by zoom but I am at a loss at how the Council can justify running an election by Zoom.

"I fully agree that the Council should ensure that election is fully planned and COVID secure but not by someone who lives nearly 100 miles away on £700 a day. This appointment will have cost the Council nearly £100,000 - it would have been much wiser to have appointed someone on a permanent basis not £700 day rate.

Over £107 million has been given to Bury in various support grants throughout this pandemic but at least now we know where the money is going.

Cllr. Paul Cropper, Deputy Leader of Conservative Group:

"Businesses and our communities are struggling due to this pandemic, I believe the Council should focus on supporting the very people who elect them not outside consultants.

"I am astonished that the Council can find £700 a day in Consultancy fees but unable to support home business workers who have had nothing from Bury Council since the pandemic began.

"2020 was a horrible year for residents and businesses both in Bury and across the country. Throughout this time the Labour Council have complained about government support not being enough".

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For more information please contact Cllr. Nick Jones, Leader of the Conservative Group

M: 07495297160

E: n.jones@bury.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

Conservative Group questioned the interim appointment in July 2020 which was funded from 'Transformational Funding' –

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s23285/6A.%20Questions%20and%20responses%20orunning%20order%20FV.pdf>