

QUESTION BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Please return your completed question form to Democratic Support, Plymouth City Council, Ballard House, West Hoe Road, Plymouth, PL1 3BJ or email:

democraticservices@plymouth.gov.uk

Question to be submitted no later than 5 clear working days before the meeting.

Question submitted by: Mr Mathew Surtees
To the Cabinet Member or Chair for: Planning
To be asked at the next (Council, Cabinet or Planning Committee) Meeting: City Council Date: 24 November 2025
Question: In a recent meeting, you said: "we are not here to represent the public" this has already been widely publicised. I'd like to ask you Councillor Stevens, why you think you don't represent the public who put you where you are?
Answer: As Chair of our city's Planning Committee I have a duty to ensure Planning laws are not broken. A key part of this is making sure councillors do not put our Planning decisions at risk or leave council tax payers to foot the bill for legal costs. It is important to understand that applications must be decided on their objective Planning merits alone. That means we do not, indeed cannot, include the number of public comments as part of our decision-making and that is what the comment you have highlighted was referring to. When we are acting in our quasi-judicial roles on the Planning committee we are not representing the residents of our individual wards, we are considering the applications before us on their Planning merits. If there are Planning Committee members who do not understand their legal responsibilities in this regard that is a concern and we may need to identify if further training is required. I give everyone time to have their say and am proud to have brought in many changes to make Plymouth's Planning processes more accessible and responsive to the public and I'm always keen to hear more suggestions that can help in this way. To address Mr Surtees' point about representation I want to make it clear, that in my capacity as a ward councillor, I actively and passionately represent everyone in Devonport Ward, which includes Devonport itself, Mount Wise, Granby, Morice Town and Keyham, and have done for more than 20 years. Being their voice on the City Council, along with Councillors Mark Coker and Anne Freeman, is an honour and a privilege. I regularly speak up for local people on many committees, boards and community groups and I like to think I have a reputation in Devonport for getting things done. I regularly get potholes repaired, fly tipping removed, grass cut and problem parking dealt with and I endeavour every day to represent those to whom I'm accountable to the best of my ability.

