

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Questions – Council 23rd April 2015

Question 1 from Councillor Ware-Lane to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport

Question

Members will be aware that I, and my fellow Milton councillor, Cllr Nevin, have some reservations regarding the redevelopment proposals for the Seaway Car Park. At a recent meeting I was assured by the portfolio holder, Cllr Terry, that he would ensure that the road infrastructure in and around the Seaway Car Park, would be improved to cope with additional traffic demands.

Would the portfolio holder please give me an update on where we are on this issue?

Answer

The Highways capacity and management issues will be presented by the developer and dealt with as part of the formal planning application. The traffic and transport issues will of course be of great importance in appraising the application.

The developer has sought advice from Officers through the pre-application stages in preparing their scheme and will be employing the usual highways modelling software to make sure that all reasonable scenarios are modelled and any necessary mitigation measures are implemented. Should this work demonstrate that mitigation measures are necessary, then the required infrastructure can be secured by condition or a S106 Agreement.

In addition to infrastructure, electronic signage is being installed/implemented to ensure better usage of town centre car parks on busier days and the seafront businesses have greatly welcomed this innovation.

Officers are also working with the developer to ensure that transport and parking issues are appropriately managed both during, and following completion of the development, should planning permission be granted.

Question 2 from Cllr Ware-Lane to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health & Housing

Question

Noting the UNISON petition on cuts to mental health services, can the portfolio holder confirm that he has met with affected staff, and can he outline what steps are being taken on this issue?

Answer

I met with the staff, together with their union representative, on 1st April 2015 and they are currently being consulted as part of the Council's Managing Organisation Change Policy, in line with the procedures agreed with their trade union. I have been working closely with Officers and I am assured that all carers and service users have been identified and they will all be offered alternative services to meet their needs. When I met the staff I pledged that a list of all the carers and service users will be produced illustrating what they get now and what they will be getting. I will be overseeing this to make sure that all service users and carers continue to get on-going support. Some 6 staff (4 ½ FTE), who were previously managed by SEPT but paid by the Council, are affected by these changes and as with other downsizing exercises in the Council, every effort will be made to find the staff suitable alternative employment.

Question 1 from Cllr Callaghan to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health & Housing

Question

In regards to the new housing company we have a problem in our town, that our local people cannot get a rented property because they are quickly taken as soon as they become available.

So can we have an assurance that all property's purchased for rental by this new company are allocated for local residents so they have priority (Basildon has a 7 year allocation policy and no exceptions due to the fact that the funding is coming from the local council tax payers)?

Answer

The Council is investigating the different models available in terms of setting up a Local Housing Company (LHC) and in particular the legal and governance implications.

Any affordable rented properties built by the Housing Company in the future would have to be allocated either through the Council's published Allocations Policy – this a legal requirement - or we could give increased weighting to either local people and/or for those who are working/making a positive contribution to the community. It's also highly likely that the Council will be supporting the Local Housing Company to look at other forms of tenure such as shared ownership etc. All of this would be subject to Members' decisions as the policy develops.

Question 2 from Cllr Callaghan to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health & Housing

Question

Can you also tell me who has the contract to run this new company, as we know the council cannot run a company of their own?

Answer

No decision has been made at this stage on Southend Borough Council's Local Housing Company.

Question from Cllr McMahon to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport

Question

Last year the then Council Leader, Councillor Holdcroft refused to acknowledge that in some parts of the town, there is a problem with members of the public routinely spitting on the pavements.

Does the current Administration agree with Councillor Holdcroft's view on this?

Answer

I agree that this activity is both unsightly and unnecessary and can be construed as a public order offence, similar to that of urinating in a public

place. However, this would need a specific bye-law to enforce and an agreement from the police to resource any enforcement on witnessed incidents.

However, the Council receives very few complaints regarding this concern and it may be more of a perception than an actual problem that exists. In these circumstances, as with dog fouling, it is very difficult to account for this type of disgusting human behaviour and very difficult to enforce, the problem clearly exists but I would suggest, as with dog fouling, it's a matter of education.

Question from Cllr Waterworth to the Leader

Question

With HMRC being a major employer in Southend-on-Sea, does the Portfolio Holder believe that investment in tax inspectors to track down 'missing' taxes could benefit the town twice over: swelling the public purse and lessening cuts inflicted on Local Government?

Answer

All the major political parties are signalling a crackdown on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance in their manifestos, and pledge to use any resultant increase in tax received to reduce the national budget deficit and to fund various manifesto commitments. To the extent that this may avoid even more reductions in government grant to local authorities, it is to be welcomed. Unfortunately, I suspect that whoever forms the next government, the cuts to local government will continue.

If the chosen method to achieve this tax crackdown is an expansion in sustained, quality employment opportunities at Southend HMRC for Southend residents, it is to be doubly welcomed, not least because it will put money directly into the pockets of Southend families and through them into the Southend economy.”