

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Council Meeting – 23rd February 2017

Question 1 from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Public Protection Services

Question 1

In 2106 I have checked all the roads in Westborough. There are around 47 Seal properties. Many stickers have faded numbers and the stickers are peeling off. How often are the properties checked for the standards agreed and when will the stickers be changed and new numbers written?

Answer

The Council works closely with SEAL and supports their approach to raise standards in how rented properties are managed in the private sector. They currently have over 73 members which includes 20 Agents and 53 Landlords and currently manage over 7,000 properties in the Borough. SEAL members are expected to carry out property condition visits at their properties on a regular basis and at a minimum of every 6 months.

The use of SEAL managed properties is part of that process which gives passersby reassurance that the property is managed by a SEAL accredited landlord. I will ask whether SEAL could place new stickers in windows where these have faded.

Seal advises its members to renew the I D Stickers when damaged. Although the membership number may fade SEAL can still ascertain as to who the member is. As part of the SEAL compliancy all our members as part of the Seal Code of Conduct are duty bound to send in copies of property inspection reports on a six monthly basis and on a three monthly basis for larger portfolio holders and Agents.

Question 2 from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Culture, Tourism and the Economy

Question

In 2017 Southend Council is celebrating 125 years of Southend. What events are being planned and what are the costs for each one. How is this being financed when the council have to make cuts of 28 million pounds?

Answer

A series of events have been proposed to mark both the 125th Anniversary of the Borough and the centenary of Priory Park being gifted to the Borough.

Whilst the annual budget savings make for difficult decisions – the £28 million you refer to is over three years. The administration is also committed to investing in the community and this commemorative one-off funding is allocated from reserves. It is not part of the annual revenue budget. Final costs for each event is not yet finalised and we are seeking sponsorship to reduce the cost burden to the Council.

The planned events and commemorations so far include: The iconic Poppies ‘Wave’ sculpture which will be on display between 12th April – 25th June; Priory Park Flower Festival to be held in August, refurbishment of the main gates to Priory Park and hosting the Grand finale of the Silk River Project. There are other bids also being developed and the Council is additionally receiving ideas from community groups to develop several smaller events.

Question from Mr Nelson to the Executive Councillor for Children and Learning

Question

In the latest progress 8 report Futures College along Southchurch Boulevard is one of 300 schools nationwide considered to be under performing. Considering the current administration's commitment to have every child in the Borough attend a good or outstanding school, what plans are in place to support Futures College achieve their potential?

Answer

Supporting the Interim Executive Board and leadership team at Futures College remains a priority for the Council. You may be aware that the Council has already taken a range of strategic decisions in order to improve outcomes at the college. These include removing the governing body and replacing them with a very experienced Interim Executive Board (IEB); securing with the Department for Education a strong and experienced trust, Parallel Learning from Barking and Dagenham, to sponsor the college once it becomes an academy later this year; and purchasing and refurbishing more suitable accommodation for the relocation of the college. In addition we have commissioned direct support, intervention and challenge undertaken by officers and school leaders.

Unfortunately, despite the intensive support to the College, outcomes in the summer were not as predicted. The Council continues to intervene directly through the IEB to hold the College to account for the improvements required. We recognise that this remains a period of some turbulence for the College, who are still facing challenges alongside other schools such as recruitment and funding. The Council are none the less both determined and optimistic that the College, under the new sponsor will be able to make the improvements that are required.

Question from Mr Garne to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Public Protection.

Question

To what extent and to what degree are arrangements for the provision of affordable housing included in the major housing developments in the town, especially those in the Victoria Avenue vicinity? How will these be policed?

Answer

The Council's policy on the matter is set out within the Southend Core Strategy. This requires new developments of 10 or more units to include a minimum percentage of affordable housing units - 20% in the case of schemes of 10 – 49 units and 30% in the case of schemes of 50 or more. Affordable housing is secured by way of legal agreements, known as S106 Agreements, which are monitored by the Council's S106 Officer. For example, the site known as Heath & Carby House is being developed via a planning permission and will include 52 units of affordable housing.

In the case of other developments currently underway on Victoria Avenue, many of them are being built under legislation brought in, in 2013, which allows for the conversion of offices to flats without the need for planning permission. In such cases there is no legislative basis upon which the Council can secure affordable housing.

Of course, the recent Government *Housing White Paper* proposes a number of measures to boost the supply of housing, including more resources for planning departments, and incentivising the use of brownfield land, unused public land and higher density house-building.