

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

Questions – Council 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015

### **Question 1 from Councillor David Garston to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport** **Question**

Could the Leader please advise Council what the saving is on the withdrawal of parking permits for volunteers working at the CAB and SAVS?

### **Answer**

Historically the Council has issued parking permits to voluntary organisations, including CAB and SAVS, to recognise the important role they play in the life of the town.

There has not been a formal policy and it is therefore proposed to bring forward a formal proposal to provide parking permit dispensations to voluntary and charitable organisations for the new financial year.

This will ensure that parking permits are provided on an equitable basis and appropriate controls are in place for their use.

The Council has informed the voluntary organisations concerned of the review process and agreed interim arrangements.

The formal proposal will help ensure that volunteers will be able to continue their valuable work in the community and loss of income to the Council is minimised.

### **Question 2 from Councillor David Garston to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport**

### **Question**

When and where was this reversal of Council Policy, regarding parking permits for volunteers, authorised and recorded?

### **Answer**

As I have explained in my first answer, we are currently formulating a proposal for the new financial year.

### **Question 3 from Councillor Ayles to the Leader of the Council**

#### **Question**

The current system for photo calls conducted through the council media office only allows the cabinet holder to be present. I and a number of councillors believe that this is unfair as it does not give any recognition to the ward councillors for their hard work on a project and allows the Cabinet holder to take all the glory when they may have had little or no input into the subject of the photo call.

I'm sure the leader would agree this is not in line with the current leaders statements of transparency and fair play. Would the leader agree and revise the system in that when a photo call is called in a ward the ward councillors of that ward are automatically invited.

#### **Answer**

Thank you Cllr Ayles for the question.

There are no plans to revise the current system, which has been in place for a number of years, follows national guidance, and our own Constitution.

It is the well-established practice of this Council that where relevant, photo-calls organised by the communications team involve the Executive Councillor, just as they are the named spokesman for their portfolio (apart from during the pre-election period). National regulations and advice preclude the communications team from producing publicity material promoting individual councillors on an individual basis that could be seen as trying to affect public support for that individual.

Part 5d, 10.1.2 of the Council's Constitution sets out the Council's position further and states that:

- Cabinet members and Committee Chairman may make statement to the press/media on Council matters and may represent the Council in media interviews. If a Cabinet Member or Committee Chairman wants to speak to the press/media in a personal capacity or as a representative of their political group they should make this clear at the outset

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10.1.3 states that:

- If other Members wish to speak to the media then they will do this in a personal capacity or as a representative of their political group

This also applies to photo-calls.

Where ward councillors have been actively involved in the project or policy, then the Council has always tried to be inclusive. On these occasions the relevant Executive Councillor can invite a local ward councillor to a photo-call at their discretion.

As the constitution states, there is nothing to stop a local ward councillor organising their own photo-call on a ward initiative and inviting the local media themselves. I know many councillors that already do that. The communications office is happy to advise and provide local media contact details to enable that to take place.

It is also worth reminding councillors that the current system for press releases and photo calls has been in place since at least November 2003, when a document titled: **The Guidelines: Press, Media Relations & Standards** stated:

*“Any initiative or project can merit a photocall. The officer leading on the initiative in liaison with the Media and Communications Office can arrange council photocalls to publicise the event or to highlight a certain development. **A photocall should involve the member with the specific portfolio, a senior member of staff, the instigating officer and a figurehead from any partner organisation involved.**”*

The document was updated in 2009 but the above paragraph remained the same. A revised media protocol is currently being drafted and aside from slight re-wording, there is no intention to revise the principles outlined in previous versions.

#### **Question 4 from Councillor Ayles to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport**

Those Members of the Council who are near the Kent elms bridge are aware of the residents all asking the same question, why has the bridge got to be removed. I have tried and tried to get answers.

I have asked for a meeting of the councillors representing the wards around the bridge so the concerns could be addressed and answers given by council officers.

What has to happen to have a meeting?

**Answer**

An answer to this question was provided to Councillor Ayles at the Council meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015. He has also received further information from both the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director for Place.

The bridge needs to be removed in order to increase the number of lanes at Kent Elms and the capacity of the junction.

The meeting to which Cllr Ayles refers has been arranged for 21<sup>st</sup> December 2015.

**Question 5 from Councillor Courtenay to the Executive Councillor for Enterprise, Tourism & Economic Development**

**Question**

Can the Leader of the Council please inform me how much the recent Southend OVO marketing campaign (sending letters to residents) cost the Council, both directly or indirectly and what the breakeven point is, in terms of the number of sign-ups?

**Answer**

The Council has spent £7,000 on marketing which is within the marketing costs highlighted in the January Cabinet report.

In just the first week and a half from the date of launch, more than 450 residents switched to Southend Energy, saving £100,000 between them.

In the first 6 months, over 1,200 households switched, saving over £300,000. So in total more than 1,650 households in Southend are better off and the campaign has already covered its costs and more.

The marketing campaign is all about sharing the good news and encouraging others to take advantage of the savings that are available to them and to accelerate the growth of the scheme.

## **Question 6 from Councillor Courtenay to the Executive Councillor for Children & Learning**

### **Question**

Whilst I am delighted to find out, from reading the Southend Echo, that the portfolio holder and the Leader of the Council have finally decided (some 18 months after forming the Administration) to take some action to reverse the decrease in the number of Southend pupils going to the town's grammar schools that has taken place under their watch.

Why has the portfolio holder taken her eye off of the ball and lost the momentum that her predecessor and previous Administration had built up in increasing the number of Southend's children going to the grammars?"

### **Answer**

The former Portfolio Holder (and I note, not the Shadow) seems to consider himself personally responsible for almost every achievement. I am sure that this would be of interest to the schools! Does he hold himself personally responsible for the appalling decline in numbers in recent years, brought to the attention of this Council by Cllr Julian Ware-Lane and subsequently made the topic of an In-depth Scrutiny project? Years and years of decline – under his watch.

As you can see by the figures, in the last year of your office 231 children passed the 11+, in my first year that rose to 259 and this year we achieved 246. As you say yourself, the leader and I are introducing more initiatives to further improve the pass rate. We are not complacent and will continue the progress we are making.

It was under 'his' watch and is still now – the aspiration of this Council that children should go to GOOD schools – not just grammar schools. The recent regional Ofsted report places us at 3<sup>rd</sup> for primary schools and 4<sup>th</sup> for secondary schools. Nationally our results at GCSE put us up from 42<sup>nd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>. This happened under 'my' watch. A rather different scenario from last year, when Ofsted were critical of our overall performance.

## **Question 7 from Councillor Cox to the Leader of the Council**

### **Question**

The Leader of the Council has repeatedly claimed in this Chamber that the previous Administration borrowed too much. Can the Leader of the

Council tell the Chamber which projects funded from borrowing he wouldn't have proceeded with had he been Leader at the time?

**Answer**

If I had the opportunity of being leader prior to this administration, I would have taken a long term view on the financing of the capital programme during the setting of the revenue budget, looking at innovative and alternative methods of funding to ensure that the capital projects proceeded to maintain the investment in our Town.

**Question 8 from Councillor Flewitt to the Leader of the Council (responding on behalf of the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning & Regulatory Services)**

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that Peter Fletcher Associates are the consultants who will carry out the sheltered housing review and share with the chamber the briefing given to them (As written or oral)?

**Answer**

We have secured project support from two experienced housing specialists who have been involved in this type of reviewing work alongside other local authorities and sheltered housing providers nationwide. They are employed by Peter Fletcher Associates and they have sound knowledge of best practice across the sheltered housing sector covering asset management approaches and service delivery.

They will work alongside SBC and South Essex Homes to progress our review of the housing needs of older adults in Southend. Peter Fletcher Associates were selected following a procurement exercise based solely on the scope of the work discussed and agreed at the Housing Working Party of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

They were appointed on the basis of technical expertise and value for money, being well under the maximum price threshold. We will very shortly be writing to Members, and to tenants to explain that the work is about to begin and inviting them to take up opportunities to engage with the process as the work progresses. I am sure the Portfolio holder would be happy to meet with you to discuss this further.

## **Question 9 from Councillor J Garston to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport**

### **Question**

Has the new waste and recycling contract been monitored to ensure customer satisfaction and has the annual autumn leaves clearance been as efficient and intense as previous years under Cory?

### **Answer**

The new contract with Veolia is monitored very closely by the Council, including customer satisfaction alongside all enquiries and service requests raised by residents.

I am pleased to announce that the transitional period from Cory to Veolia went exceptionally well and there has been no significant increase in the number of complaints received during this transitional period.

With regards to leaf fall, I can advise that the service has been delivered in accordance with the contract and I have been advised that only a handful of complaints were received by the Council for the entire leaf fall period.

The operational schedule is published on the website so residents can view this to find out as to when their road is scheduled to be cleared and this information is also provided by the Customer Service Team, should residents contact us directly. All reports made are checked against the schedule and residents are made aware as to when their road will be visited when they contact us.

However, it is imperative that the agreed schedule is followed so that it can be delivered across the entire Borough in the most efficient and effective way.

## **Question 10 from Councillor J Garston to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport**

### **Question**

Following the meetings held to look at Highways issues and in particular to consider Policy around Residents Parking Schemes, when will members be updated with regard to the new proposed criteria for such schemes?

## **Answer**

The Traffic & Parking Working Party and Cabinet Committee established a working group to review existing working and policies under its remit. As Councillor Garston says, officers have held meetings with Members of the Traffic & Parking Working Party in this regard where various options have been under consideration/discussions.

Based on these and Members' input, it is proposed to report back the findings with recommendations, including policy around Residents Parking Schemes, to the Traffic & Parking Working Party and Cabinet Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016.