

Council – 18th July 2024

Councillor Questions

1. Question from Councillor Campbell to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety (Cllr Terry)

Question

What steps is the Cabinet Member for Community Safety taking to prevent drink spiking in Southend?

Answer

Essex Police is the lead authority in investigating spiking incidents. The licensing team actively work with Essex Police and with licensees to assist in this. The latest strand of this work includes amendments to the Licensing Policy including a specific section on spiking which encourages licensees to increase the training offer for their staff. It also encourages licensees to put in place procedures to protect potential victims, such as the provision of equipment and/or systems to enable customers to protect their drinks and test them against drink spiking and adopting the Ask for Angela programme.

The Licensing Policy, which links in with the council's harmful behaviours strategy, is out for consultation, and will be across the summer. We would welcome comments on the draft Licensing policy from interested parties as part of that consultation.

2. Question from Councillor Campbell to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism and Business (Cllr Dent)

Question

What recent assessment has the Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism and Business made of the night-time economy of Southend High Street, and what plans does he have to improve the district?

Answer

At the end of last year, the Night Time Economy Group (NTEG) conducted a comprehensive assessment to support Southend's recent successful Purple Flag submission. This assessment was in addition to an independent evaluation from Purple Flag adjudicators. Southend's achievement in securing the accreditation for the 12th consecutive year demonstrates that our city centre exceeds the minimum standards across all criteria: Wellbeing, Movement, Appeal, Place, and Policy. Building on this success, the NTEG has continued to perform further independent assessments of our night-time economy, which accounts for approximately 17% of all city centre hereditaments (ratable business premises). These ongoing evaluations aim to drive continuous improvements and form the basis for future initiatives and projects, ensuring Southend continues to enhance its appeal as an attractive destination for both residents and visitors.

Current plans to boost the city centre's night time economy focus on enhancing safety, business support, place-making and marketing through a number of ongoing initiatives which include:

- *Retention of Southend's Purple Flag accreditation, a national standard award, recognising safe and prosperous night time economies*
- *Providing support to businesses interested in setting up on or around the High St to the best of our ability.*
- *Providing ongoing development and resources to established NTE businesses through initiatives such as the Night Time Economy Pack*

- *Growth of the multi-agency nighttime economy group (NTEG) who continue to deliver a number of projects to support and promote the night time economy*
- *Ongoing targeted place-making and promotion initiatives to highlight Southend's nighttime attractions. This includes promoting events, cultural activities as well as the unique and exciting nighttime establishments the city has to offer.*

3. Question from Councillor Ayles to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and the Local Plan (Cllr Anne Jones)

Question

Planning application 24/00421/bc3 was passed by development control. The reason given despite a number of items that would have stopped any other application. The application was passed as Southend city council are desperate for social housing and the loss of 14 serviceable garages and the occupants being evicted that were an asset for the area was outweighed by 2 small houses that would be built. Can an explanation be given as to why other far more suitable prepared sites were not considered thus saving the 14 garages for residents to use and relieve parking pressures of the area.

Answer

The Strategic Housing team routinely examines council owned sites across the city for their suitability to be developed for much needed social housing. The underutilised garage site at Bradford Bury was one of those sites identified and proposed for the scheme for which planning permission (24/00421/BC3) has been granted. The site provides an appropriate scale and is suitably located for council housing development.

4. Question from Councillor Aylen to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and the Local Plan (Cllr Anne Jones)

Question

In Belfairs park recreation ground a cycle shed was installed as permitted development. Please explain as to why the cycle shed was permitted development when other similar installation required planning permission?

Answer

The cycle shelter concerned was found to be permitted development as it met all the relevant criteria for being permitted development, as set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). This includes the two key criteria in this case, that the building would not exceed 4 metres in height and 200 cubic metres in volume. Any other cycle shelters or similar buildings would need to be assessed against the same criteria to establish if they comprised permitted development.

5. Question from Cllr Garston to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

The latest stats show that Anglian Water are discharging sewers into our seawater at an unacceptable level thus making the water undesirable for swimming. Can the Portfolio Holder advise me what action the Cabinet is taking to try and resolve the problem?

Answer

Increases in sewage releases along our Thames estuary is one of the most pressing environmental issues of the day. These sewer discharges are exacerbated by outdated infrastructure, with development outpacing the sewer system's capacity, and climate change causing increased periods of intense rainfall. These factors contribute to increased Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) events.

These releases are something that our residents care deeply about, as it directly affects their ability to enjoy our marvellous coastline, along with knock-on impacts to our tourism. It also threatens the welfare of our coastal ecosystem, which is especially precarious given that nearly all of our coastline falls within an SSSI.

However, the council lacks direct regulatory authority, which sits with the Environment Agency with the obligations on Anglian Water. However, the Council engages with Anglian Water on strategic projects to mitigate these issues. We also actively participate in local water summits.

One significant initiative is the DEFRA-funded "Catchment to Coast," which seeks innovative solutions for flood risk, coastal erosion, and drought resilience. The project's findings will help shape future policies and funding for environmental challenges.

Furthermore, the council and Anglian Water are collaborating on the Advanced WINEP (Water Industry National Environmental Programme), a dedicated effort to tackle CSO and sewer misconnections in Southend. With a £50 million budget from 2025 to 2029, the program aims to implement improvement schemes, including a specific project on Thorpe Hall Avenue to reduce sewer flooding.

These collaborative efforts are expected to lead to substantial improvements in flood management and CSO reduction over the next five years, potentially setting a national standard for addressing such environmental concerns.

This question directly addresses the action of our cabinet and do I would like to reassure Cllr Garston that this is an area I am personally very passionate about, having volunteered with waterway environmental charities since my youth and continuing to do beach cleans now. Since I have become a member I have proactively engaged with this issue, including playing a key role in holding Anglian Water to account by working with officers to serve an abatement notice on odours from the sewer works. This commitment continues now I am the relevant portfolio holder.

Indeed, one of my first actions was to understand what outputs we have along our coast, including not just the CSOs of Anglian Water, but also the outfalls belonging to the Council. It should be made clear that our outfalls do not release sewage, but surface water from drains along our roads etc.. However, given the importance of effective surface water management to reduce sewage releases, it is important our network is as efficient as possible. I am delighted to say that officers have detailed information on all of these. Whilst some do need some repairs and maintenance, a clear priority list has been made, and I am currently working with officers to finalise the roadmap and plan to address these.