

Council – 5th September 2024

Public Questions

1. Question from Ms Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety (Cllr Terry)

Question

The area of East Beach is subject to PSPO's around Anti-social behaviour around dog control and dogs on our beaches, breaches of coastal waters code of practice and BBQ' on Beaches. There is also legislation around illegal encampments, littering and other anti-social behaviour acts.

We continue to see BBQ's on the beach resulting in damage to the greensward and a danger to members of the public, incidents of fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour is witnessed daily and we have had a number illegal encampments sometimes of large groups, dogs left loose on the beach and boats illegally moored.

Can the Portfolio holder for Community Safety please advise how many enforcement actions have been taken against members of the public for ASB on East Beach over the past 12 months?

Answer

There have been 4 Financial Penalty Notices issued for wrongful use of BBQs at Shoebury East beach in the last 12 months.

2. Question from Ms Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety (Cllr Terry)

Question

Enforcement has been a concern for some time, right across the City but residents in the area surrounding East Beach are even more concerned to hear that the Foreshore team has suffered cuts, with no seasonal officers available to patrol our beaches. In the last summer season we were aware that a lone Foreshore Officer had difficulties in enforcing the PSPO's or By-Laws acting alone and, in fact, the team needed expanding.

Can the Portfolio holder for Community Safety please advise how many enforcement officers are employed by the council and their areas of enforcement (i.e. parking, waste etc.) and what is being done to ensure Foreshore Officers are available across our 7 miles of beaches and specifically East Beach?

Answer

There have been no cuts in the Pier and Foreshore team. The Pier and Foreshore team are funded for 10 staff. Currently there have been 8 resort staff 5 of whom are seasonal over the summer season. Recruitment continues to be challenging in the current climate and we have been unable to recruit to the full roster. Community Safety currently are budgeted for 10 officers although some remain vacant at the moment, pending DBS and vetting checks with Essex Police.

Pier and Foreshore continue to patrol all 7 miles of our beaches but are unable to be 'resident' at set beaches. The ongoing need for responding to first aid issues and lost children and the public reaction to uniformed officers requires officers to work in pairs on occasion which focuses resources at those times on specific areas.

Unfortunately, it is sometimes necessary to divert staff to where they are needed most which can vary depending on tides, the weather and other factors such as event support or partner working with coast guard and other agencies.

We continue to monitor all beaches regularly on a mobile basis including east beach as regularly as possible and will continue to do so.

3. Question from Mr Webb to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety (Cllr Terry)

Question

Over the summer there have been high volumes of drinking and anti-social behaviour in the High Street impacting on the shops and banks in the area and the limited powers of street rangers to tackle these issues. Making the High Street a no-go area for residents and visitors.

What strategies and powers can Southend Council give the police and street rangers to tackle this antisocial behaviour in the high street in the Autumn and Winter seasons?

Answer

Anti-Social Behaviour is down by almost 30% compared to previous 12 months across the City. A key element of that reduction has been a focus on behaviours in the High Street. It is not a no go area.

Southend City Council's Community Safety Unit work closely with Essex Police and the Street Rangers, to tackle street drinking and associated anti-social behaviour, through a range of tools at their disposal.

This includes welfare engagement, providing access to support services, extensive CCTV monitoring, and enforcement on persistent offenders, via our public space protection orders, community protection notices, and / or criminal behaviour orders.

A new safe space zone will be deployed at weekends, towards the beginning of Autumn in the High St. This will be manned by police and key partners, ensuring strong visible presence and reducing fear of crime.

4. Question from Mr Webb to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism and Business (Cllr Dent)

Question

The Council has hired a person to raise visitors to come to Southend on Sea. We have over 7 million visitors a year which brings a large amount of money to the economy of Southend and high street and seaside traders.

What strategies, events have the new person putting into place 2024 – 2025 to attract visitors to come to Southend on sea and create more money to the Southend Economy and traders in the High street and Sea side traders?

Answer

The Pier has put on additional events this year including the Spring party, Summer festival (over the bank holiday weekend), City Jam (this weekend) and the return of annual events such as El Galeon Andalusia at Southend Pier, the Puppet Festival and Waverley Paddle steamer. We also continue to run our heritage events such as the Anglo Saxon weekend, Romans day and the up coming space events. In addition we continue to attract visitors to the city through our regular and highly praised art exhibitions. In the last 2 months alone we have opened 3 new exhibitions across the Beecroft and Focal point galleries.

There have also been cosmetic and infrastructure improvements to the Pier to attract more visitors which will be ongoing such as our new wall of mirrors, land mark pointer and corridor of flowers.

There has barely been a week go by his summer where the pier or city has not had an event of some form taking place.

This administration's ambition was to increase events over the summer with continuous weeks of events and activity on the pier and 6 city wide events by next year. We have invested in the infrastructure to support this and are working towards building a stronger and more focused team that will develop and grow the events we put on as well as supporting others to come to Southend to hold their events in our city.

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

Question

How much food waste has been collected over the last two years from Saxon Gardens and Viking Court?

Answer

Unfortunately, it isn't possible to determine the exact amount of food waste collected from the two locations. Collected material is taken to the processing location in one vehicle which collects from many other locations through a working day.

6. Question from Mr Ali to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

What measures are the Council currently taking to help improve food waste collections from Saxon Gardens and Viking Court?

Answer

If the locations are experiencing issues with food waste collections, this can be resolved with our service provider. They have been notified of this question and will be visiting the locations to check on food waste provisions and speaking to the collection crews to ensure a good service is provided.

In addition, a service reminder letter will be delivered to the households at the locations as a reminder of the use of our waste services. If there are any further issues they can be raised via My Southend or the contact centre so these can be resolved with our service provider.

7. Question from Mr George to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Could the Leader of the Council provide the assurance that in the spirit of open, honest and transparent governance, all public questions and answers provided at Full Council, Scrutiny Committees and all other public meetings are published in the future so that it can be seen that we are responding fully to the concerns of the residents of the City of Southend?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Mr George. The joint administration's agreement lays out our principles of honesty, openness, transparency, and collaboration. That is why under this administration all councillor questions are published on the website 24 hours before the Council meeting and all public Questions are published on the website within a couple of days of the meeting concluding. Public questioners who are unable to attend are sent the answers in writing. This level of transparency is new to Southend-on-Sea City Council, and we are proud to have introduced it this year.

My administration has a strong and passionate commitment to openness and transparency, as demonstrated by my public updates around Southend United within days of becoming Leader of the Council, and which continued until the takeover completed. We also are creating more content to update our residents on what the council is doing including the popular 'Southend in 60 Seconds' video series, our frequent media releases, and regularly updated website. We will continue to find new ways to engage and inform our residents including continuing to publish questions on our website, which is an initiative we are proud to have delivered.

8. Question from Mr George to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and the Local Plan (Cllr Jones)

Question

Could the Portfolio Holder for Housing provide a breakdown for the period from May 2019 until May 2024 for each and every year of firstly how many Council houses have been built in Southend and secondly how many properties have been purchased by the Council for use as Council houses?

Answer

During the period of May 2019-May 2024, a total of 19 council homes have been built and 109 acquired for use as council homes, a total of 128 additional council homes. This is broken down by year below:

2019-20

New council homes – 15

Acquisitions – 27

2020-21

Acquisition – 18

2021-22

New council homes: 4

Acquisitions: 23

2022-23

Acquisitions: 17

2023-24

Acquisitions: 24

We are proud to have introduced the acquisitions programme under a previous joint administration, and it has been successful in helping us to increase our housing stock. We will continue this programme and seek to complement it with more new council homes through our housing pipeline work.

9. Question from Mr Miller to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and the Local Plan (Cllr Jones)

Question

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that no green spaces or greenbelt land will be built on in Southend and if greenbelt land has been earmarked, which areas have been identified?

Answer

There have been no changes to the Councils adopted development plan policy documents as they relate to land designated as protected green spaces or the green belt (nor in any other regard). Any changes to these, through a new Local Plan, would need to be the subject of an extensive consultation process and an Examination In Public overseen by a Planning Inspector.

Consistent with long standing national planning policy and legislation all applications for planning permission must be considered on their individual planning merits. Where proposals are a departure from policy, for example those which seek to protect the green belt, they are required to be advertised and considered as such.

There may be instances, for example the previous proposals by Southend United FC for a new stadium and housing at Fossetts Farm, where development in the Green Belt or on land with another type of designation is considered appropriate. However, a scheme will need to deliver sufficient planning benefit to outweigh any harm caused by the conflict with policy in such circumstances if it is to be granted permission. In practice this will be a high bar to reach.

10. Question from Mr Miller to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and the Local Plan (Cllr Jones)

Question

Can you confirm that this Council is against building on greenbelt land and our green spaces and if so, can you confirm the legal avenues the Council will follow to block any building on greenbelt land or our green spaces?

Answer

The Council's adopted development plan policy documents (often referred to as our Local Plan) seeks to resist building on the Green Belt, unless it is for purposes which are appropriate in the Green Belt (for example those related to agriculture).

They also offer very strong levels of protection to areas designated as protected green space and take a 'brownfield first' approach to development. Consistent with well established national planning policy and legislation all applications for planning permission must be considered on their individual planning merits.

There is no planning mechanism that can be put in place which provides an outright block on building on land with designations such as green belt and protected green space. Where proposals are a departure from policy, for example those which seek to protect the green belt, they are required to be advertised and considered as such.

It is important to recognise that there may be instances, for example as previously stated previous proposals by Southend United FC for a new stadium and housing at Fossetts Farm, where development in the Green Belt or on land with another type of designation is considered appropriate.

However, a scheme will need to deliver sufficient planning benefit to outweigh any harm caused by the conflict with policy in such circumstances if it is to be granted permission. In practice this will be a high bar to reach.

11. Question from Mr Whitby to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the work to test whether Veolia's reported SLA times are accurate and what their findings were?

Answer

The Council monitors performance of the KPIs on the current waste contract, and will continue to have SLAs/ KPIs on the incoming new waste contract. Where there are deviations, we work with the waste contractor to recover performance to the acceptable level. There are multiple KPIs across the various different branches of the waste contract that must be monitored.

This administration is committed to restoring civic pride, and a substantial part of that is improving street cleanliness and having a service that is efficient and responsive in taking action when there are reports, as well as putting in the strategic changes to reduce the instances in the first place.

On becoming cabinet member, I personally requested a list of all the graffiti reports from MySouthend during March-May, and personally visited these sites in June. I did find there were areas that had not been cleaned. As a result, we are looking to action additional graffiti clear ups in coming weeks. However, it wasn't clear if some of this problem was due to the switch over of MySouthend systems, so I will be repeating this test later this year.

12. Question from Mr Whitby to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety (Cllr Terry)

Question

Why does the Council not report crime to the police (e.g. Graffiti)?

Answer

The Council removes offensive graffiti within 24 hours. If the graffiti incites racial hatred, it will be recorded and police will be notified.

If the Council is informed of any crime by a witness or a victim, the Council will encourage that person to directly report it to police. If the Council witnesses any crime, police again will be notified directly by the Council.

13. Question from Ms Ekins to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

Long before Southend was turned into a concrete jungle, there were water pumps, wells, and drinking fountains all around the town providing fresh drinking water to residents and holidaymakers. Last summer, the council paid Veolia to collect “20 tonnes of rubbish and litter from the seafront alone” each weekend*. Imagine if the residents and tourists throwing away all those plastic drink bottles could refill just one bottle from one of Southend’s drinking water fountains. How much would that save the Council on rubbish collection in the future.

With the lack of shade in central parts of the city, and the hope to encourage tourism, Southend has a chance to compete with Paris, Rome, Berlin, and London (in partnership with Thames Water**) on this issue.

Can the Council commit to a feasibility study to get drinking fountains installed across the city, and to approach Anglian Water’s Community Infrastructure Levy for funding?

Answer

Thank you for your suggestion, and I agree that we must seek out new ways to tackle plastic waste, especially on our seafront.

The Council does invest in its operational buildings through the Property Refurbishment Programme and other capital programmes. As part of this the Council will consider where water refill points may be appropriately provided for residents, visitors and staff including seeking funding from external sources where available.

14. Question from Mr Gittus to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

All businesses are required to organise their own waste removal through a private waste operator. What measures have the Council put into place to ensure that commercial waste is recycled appropriately, rather than being dumped in landfill or burnt and what enforcement action does the Council take if commercial properties use the domestic service?

Answer

All businesses have a legal responsibility to dispose of their waste responsibly. These responsibilities are embodied in a range of legislation including:

- Duty of Care (Environmental Protection Act 1990)
- Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011
- Landfill Directive- Pre-treatment of Waste Regulation 2007

The Landfill Directive requires all businesses to ensure that non-hazardous waste is treated before it is sent to landfill. The most obvious treatment option is recycling but it can also include “physical, thermal, chemical or biological processes, including sorting, that change the characteristics of the waste in order to reduce its volume or hazardous nature, facilitate its handling or enhance recovery”.

The primary aim of the legislation is to increase recycling and to reduce avoidable polluting emissions from landfill.

The Council does not have the jurisdiction to influence the end processing of commercial waste but we do provide businesses with educational information about their legal waste responsibilities through our website and educational visits to ensure businesses do not use the household collections and ensure a contract is in place with a licensed waste carrier. Businesses must retain records of waste transfers for a period of no less than 2 years. Failure to provide evidence is an offence and breach of the Duty of Care, with a penalty of up to £5,000 on summary conviction or an unlimited fine on conviction on indictment. Under the Clean Neighbourhoods Act 2005 a Fixed Penalty Notice of £300 may be issued by the local Council for failure to provide evidence when requested.

15. Question from Mrs Byford to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

Who is responsible for maintaining Churchill Gardens and why is the water level so low at the moment?

I pulled out a disgusting foam mattress from the main pond yesterday. It needs a good clean out and filling up. Also needs more bins please.

Answer

Thank you for your question. Responsibility for the maintenance of Churchill Gardens is with the council's Parks Service.

The current ongoing dry weather has affected the level of the water pond.

Following the submission of your question I have asked officers in the parks service to prioritise the maintenance of Churchill Gardens and officers from the waste team are reviewing current bin provision to see what improvements can be made.