

Council – 18th July 2024

Public Questions

1. Question from Mr Webb to the Cabinet Member for the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

How much does it cost to run local elections each year including the creation and delivery of polling cards and postal voters, polling day, and hiring Garrons for the count?

Answer

The cost of the local elections in 2023/24 was £271,000 which was offset by a government grant of £54,000. The costs incurred included the delivery of the poll cards, postal vote administration, polling station hire and support, verification and counting of votes and the hire of the count venue.

2. Question from Mr Webb to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

How much money did the Council receive in residents and visitors to park in car parks and what is the money raised used for?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Mr Webb. The Council has assumed you are seeking the income generated from pay & display charges in all Council managed car parks across the city.

For the last financial year, covering April 1st 2023 to 31st March 2024, the Council received £4,460,379 (excluding Vat) from customers paying to park in Council operated car parks across the city. Previous annual parking reports are available on the Council's website and they will include parking income for those years. Web links below;

2022/23 - <https://www.southend.gov.uk/parking-2/annual-parking-report-202223>

2021/22 - <https://www.southend.gov.uk/parking-2/annual-parking-enforcement-report-202021>

Any surplus income made (after direct costs are deducted) from parking charges and penalty charges is governed by section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. Once the need for provision of off-street parking facilities and to make good deficits to central funding has been met, use of surpluses is currently confined to the provision of public transport services or to road, air quality, environmental, or open space improvements.

3. Question from Mr Ali to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Why do we have three Councillors representing the Council at South Essex Homes Board?

Answer

The Articles of Association created when South Essex Homes was established in 2005 state that there shall be three Council Board members. As such, we appoint three members to the board from the councillors who express interest in serving on the board by way of a vote which is held at Appointments Council each year.

4. Question from Mr Ali to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Why was there no Labour Party Councillor on SEH Board last year and there is no Conservative Party Councillor on SEH Board this year?

Answer

The appointment of Council members to the Board of South Essex Homes is a decision for the Council. There were no contested seats for these positions at the Appointments Council on 20th May 2024 and therefore the three positions were allocated to the three Councillors who were subsequently appointed to the South Essex Homes board.

5. Question from Mrs Mitchell to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Healthier Communities (Cllr Sadza)

Question

The Council website has a very brief description of Disability related expenditure, but no clear Southend guidance published on what might be included as additional costs incurred due to age or disability or how the funding is calculated.

I am told by residents that non means tested allowance such as personal independence payments (PIP) are taken into account, and by doing so denies residents the opportunity to access wellbeing and social activities that improve their overall health, and give carers respite, because those funds are instead used up in disability related expenditure.

Please can the portfolio holder for social care and healthier communities explain when clear guidance for claimants will be published, and if she can undertake to challenge why PIP is not excluded from this process?

Answer

All financial assessments and subsequently all charges that are relating to people who receive adult social care services are conducted in line with the charging regulations laid out in the Care Act 2014. Annexe C para14-18 details the approach that must be taken with a person's benefits. In relation to PIP or DLA it is only the mobility component that must be disregarded, all other benefits can be considered apart from the exclusions noted in these chapters. Southend City Council complies with these regulations.

The minimum income guarantee and benefit rates/charging thresholds are set by DHSC every year. We strictly adhere to the national DHSC thresholds. The minimum income guarantee (MIG) is a legal requirement for all Councils to apply to cover a person's everyday financial expenses when receiving home care.

Within the Care Act there is a requirement for all Councils to have a charging policy. This was agreed by the Council in February 2023 and details our approach to charging people who receive social care services according to the Care Act 2014. This includes the Councils approach to the application of the Minimum Income Guarantee in line with national

guidance. This guidance is published on the council web site. However, we are in the process of improving access to social care information and advice which will improve people's access to information over the coming months. This will be done as part of our transformation work and improved customer access and a renewed section on Livewell clearly setting out Adult social Care information and advice.

We also publish a Disability Related Expenditure Leaflet. This was co-produced with people who use adult social care services. The leaflet will also form part of our information and advice online as previously mentioned. The leaflet outlines our approach to disregarding a person's disability related expenditure from their community care charges.

6. Question from Mrs Mitchell to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and SEND (Cllr Burton)

Question

Many residents, parents and carers in the SEND community have raised the issue of form filling and how ridiculously long and unnecessarily complicated applications for Disability Related Expenditure and access to other funds such as the £125,000 cost of living emergency fund are.

This adds pressure and stress to already time limited and sometimes overwhelmed carers. It often means that funds are not allocated or in some cases not even claimed. This is exacerbated by overwhelmed advocacy services.

Can the portfolio holder commit to a review of and true co-production in making these forms fit for purpose, so funds are allocated to people in need?

Answer

We are always keen to ensure our forms, information and advice are as accessible as possible. As such our social care departments follow the required accessibility standards.

Currently there are no set forms required for disability related expenses however this is covered in our financial assessments for care charging. Our form content allows us to apply the relevant statutory framework for

charging. Where people are having difficulty the Council offers support to complete these financial assessments.

With regards to the £125,000 cost of living fund there was no form required of carers or individuals to be completed. Once notified of a request through our staff or partners such as carers first then staff from these organisations were required to complete a basic form.

However, we are committed to co-production and I can confirm that any review or future form development will seek the views and guidance from those who will potentially need to complete them in the future.

7. Question from Mrs Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and the Local Plan (Cllr A Jones)

Question

The Local Plan for Southend is dated 1st March 1994, altered in 1997 and 1999 and the subsequent Development Management Document adopted July 2015.

The 2017 Neighbourhood Planning Act states that [Local planning authorities are required to review and, if necessary, update their local plan policies within five years of adoption](#). This periodic review ensures that the local plan remains relevant and responsive to changing circumstances.

It is possible that having such an outdated Local Plan could impact negatively on planning decisions, leaving us open to challenge as our City changes and develops. Some of our housing policies need updating or development urgently, such as the case for a clear policy for Homes of Multiple Occupancy.

Can the Portfolio holder for planning and housing provide an explanation for the delay, an update on progress and the mechanisms for residents to share their views about the draft plan?

Answer

The Council's adopted development plan includes a suite of local development documents that provide the overarching local planning framework for the City. The development plan for Southend comprises: Core Strategy (2007), Joint Area Action Plan for London Southend Airport and Environs (2014), Development Management Document (2015), Essex and Southend-on-Sea Joint Waste Local Plan (2017),

Southend Central Area Action Plan (2018), together with the CIL Charging Schedule (2015) and associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2015).

The Council, as Local Planning Authority, is preparing a new Local Plan for Southend which will provide an updated planning framework for the City. Alongside this, the Council will be reviewing its CIL charging schedule and Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The new Local Plan for Southend has been the subject of two stages of statutory public consultation – an Issues and Options stage document, and a Refining the Plan Options document.

The next stage of the Local Plan's preparation will include a Preferred Approach public consultation, where residents and stakeholders can comment on draft policies and potential site allocations. It is anticipated that this next stage of consultation will be considered by Cabinet this municipal year.

8. Question from Mrs Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and the Local Plan (Cllr A Jones)

Question

As a resident in Shoeburyness Ward I have been concerned about many conflicting claims about the fate of two parcels of land in the ward. One of these is the old Hinguar School playing field reference HEA 315 on George Street and the other the old football field on Elm Road HEA 317, both shown on the Southend Property Asset map as being owned by Southend City Council and are both deemed designated protected open space in the local plan.

Can either the Portfolio holder for planning and Housing or for regeneration please explain why these sites are included within the draft Local plan and what residents can do to ensure these spaces are protected and utilised as open spaces such as woodland or play areas for their community?

Answer

Both sites are designated as protected green space within the Council's adopted development plan (as defined on the Development Management Document Policies Map, 2015).

A new Southend Local Plan is being prepared that will review and update the Council's adopted development plan. Sites HEA135 Land at George Street and HEA137 Land at Elm Road, Shoeburyness, have been promoted for development to the Local Planning Authority for consideration as part of the preparation of the emerging Local Plan and as such were presented for comment, along with a range of other sites, during the last stage of consultation on the emerging plan ('Refining the Plan Options', 2021).

The emerging Local Plan is being prepared for a further stage of public consultation, in line with relevant regulations. No decisions have been made at this time, from a Local Plan perspective, on proposed development sites or allocations – including HEA135 and HEA137.

9. Question from Mr Gittus to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety (Cllr Terry)

Question

There are an increasing number of specialist user groups, whose lives are affected by the state of Britain's public toilets. These include people with mental or physical disabilities and their carers; the infirm or elderly; people with babies or young children and people of all ages who are coping with a range of medical conditions.

Southend has inadequate toilet provisions causing anxiety to visitors to our city. I have heard some of our residents won't even leave their houses due to the stress of trying to find a loo in our city centre. Residents, especially along the seafront and on roads near to the city centre will often suffer anti-social behaviour through people using their gardens and alleys as a toilet.

With our public toilet provisions continuing to decline, will the Council look at solutions to improve access to available 24/7 toilets, especially along the seafront and city centre?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

The Council currently provides approximately 200 toilets across more than 15 locations in the city including our parks. We also provide additional portable toilets at key locations including the sea front.

The city benefits from a positive relationship with our businesses and in the city centre and sea front and many locations including the Victoria shopping centre allow toilet use without purchase.

Provision of toilets available 24 hours days would need to be considered in the context of the council's ongoing financial challenge as well as the safety issues but your concerns about appropriate accessible toilets are noted.

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

Question

Southend and its surrounding areas are incredibly well served by rail connections to central and east London. With the peak season upon us, and many visitors expected to come to Southend over the next few weeks, what measure has the Council taken to encourage visitors to travel by rail rather than driving?

Answer

Southend City Council has partnered with Southend Tourism Partnership and C2C to enhance the visibility of rail travel options for visitors. We have provided C2C with a selection of our promotional images, which they are using in their station posters and other marketing materials.

Additionally, throughout the high season, we will promote our Visit Southend summer guide, which includes comprehensive information on getting to Southend by public transport. Given the high demand for parking during peak season, this guide and promotional campaign serves as a valuable resource for visitors. We are aware that direct social media campaigns specifically promoting rail travel have limited engagement, however our ongoing partnership with C2C aims to maximise the impact of our efforts, encouraging more visitors to get here by train rather than driving.

