

Council – 20th March 2025

Councillor Questions

1. Question from Councillor Courtenay to the Leader of the Council

Question

Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that it is important for the number of, and responsibilities of, Portfolio Holders to be kept under review, to ensure that the political leadership offered to our City is suitable?

Answer

The role of portfolio holders is important in delivering our strategic objectives. As Leader of the Council, I regularly review this to ensure there is a balance of responsibility across the administration.

2. Question from Councillor Campbell to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

What steps are you taking to improve road safety across Southend and in Southchurch Ward?

Answer

We are currently developing a new Highways Safety Policy, which will come through the appropriate cabinet process this year. This includes a new defined process for the assessment of new pedestrian crossings, collision investigation and casualty reduction, skid resistance and speed monitoring.

Skid resistance data is collected annually, and this is incorporated into the selection of our carriageway schemes. We have also recently been through a programme of replacement of crossings with poor surface condition, with another to come next year.

We actively manage a programme of speed monitoring and have implemented new solar powered speed warning signs on 3 roads in the city with particularly high results.

In addition, we now have innovative additional safety features on zebra crossings in the City, the first went live at Southend Hospital recently and with a further 4 to follow. In addition, we will be implementing the first AI Halo on another zebra crossing in early April and likely be the only current highway authority to have both these innovative systems in place at this time.

We work collaboratively through our highway improvement schemes for carriageway and footway and ensure any additional issues like poor signing, road markings, layouts, highway tree planting or road safety issues are picked up at the same time to generate efficiencies and reduce disruption.

3. Question from Councillor McMullan to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

It's just over a year since changes were made to the Junction at Kent Elms which were designed to improve both traffic flow and safety at this busy junction. Do we have any data as to whether we have seen any reduction in accidents here, particularly in regard to traffic traveling across the A127 or turning right onto the A127?

Answer

Officers will present a report to the Transport Regulations Working Party in due course once data is available and analysed and the report will summarise this and present options for the future of the Kent Elms junction.

4. Question from Councillor Darryl Jones to the Leader of the Council

Question

Is it true that a Senior Policy Advisor role was advertised and successfully filled that then became a Senior Policy Advisor to the Leader of the Council and what policies has this role specifically worked on that is separate to the responsibilities of the Senior Policy Advisors in the Council?

Answer

The role that was recruited to is a Senior Policy Advisor and this role is assigned to support the Leader of the Council. The role provides support across a wide range of national and local policy topics including, but not limited to, recent government policy announcements on:

- The English Devolution White Paper
- The National Planning Policy Framework
- The Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive paper
- The Employment Rights Bill
- Compulsory purchase reforms
- UK Shared Prosperity Funding
- Warm Homes Social Provider Funding
- HM Inspectorate of Policing Inspections Framework
- Planning Reform Consultations
- Safety of lithium-ion batteries campaign
- National campaign honouring PCSOs with 20 years service
- ECFRS Community Risk Management Plan
- Local Authority Treescape Funding
- Modular TA options for transitional/temporary accommodation
- Clean Air Maritime Funding
- Prosecutions and Sanctions for Sewage Dumping
- Rough Sleepers Winter Pressures Funding
- Faith group specific security and protection grants
- Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging policy
- Reducing Marine Noise and Unexploded Ordnance

5. Question from Councillor Darryl Jones to the Leader of the Council

Question

What is the job specification/description for the Policy Advisor to the Leader of the Council?

Answer

The job description for the Senior Policy Advisor role was sent to you by email on 17 February 2025.

6. Question from Councillor Stuart Allen to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Across the city, our infrastructure is frequently damaged by high-sided vehicles and vans, resulting in twisted and displaced street signs, knocked-over bollards, and wrecked verges.

Could the portfolio holder provide details on the total expenditure for repair works over the past year, and how this compares to the previous five years?

Answer

Causation is difficult to quantify and not something we record when raising repair works unless they specifically relate to road traffic collision damage. Therefore, this data is not available.

Comparisons to previous years would be also difficult to quantify due the dramatic increases in the pricing indexation in this industry in recent years, which could potentially affect any comparative data.

However, I can assure you that we take the issue seriously and we will be bringing forward new policies and guidance to protect our verges.

7. Question from Councillor Ayles to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

At the 12th of December Council meeting the Leader of the Council stated that the bicycle shed in Belfairs park will not be removed. Despite breaches in covenants, deed, land registry, no lease agreement and gate licence agreement.

Will the leader of the Council explain as to how the Council has conformed with the covenants, deeds, land registry, lease agreement and gate licence agreement?

Answer

Officers have already responded to you on all these points.

Belfairs Sports Ground is within the Council's freehold title for a much wider area of land. The title has been reviewed and there do not appear to be any restrictive covenants over the land where the cycle shelter has been installed.

8. Question from Councillor Campbell to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

What progress has been made on tackling fly-tipping following the pilot launch in December 2024?

Answer

Our focused efforts on increasing action on flytipping has continued at pace, with our new formed Environmental Crime Team able to tackle flytipping alongside other issues.

We are also continuing with our focused action in hot spots, although there have been some technical challenges and permissions needed for the camera installations which have delayed the start of the project. These have now been resolved and with the agreement of the funders the pilot launch is now scheduled for April.

9. Question from Councillor Nelson to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

Previously the administration rejected a notice of motion for a tree for every child. Can the portfolio holder please explain the rationale behind this?

Answer

It was not rejected. On 13th January 2025, Cabinet considered the minutes of the Climate, Environment and Waste Working Party held on 25th November 2025 where this Notice of Motion was discussed. The Working Party is made up of members from across the political spectrum of the Council, and all were in unanimous agreement that there were several issues with the policy as it stood. These included two main concerns:

- Even when well kept, a significant portion of new trees will die, and this can have a very negative impact on the families when their child's tree dies. This is much worse in situations where a child is also lost.
- We have moved focus in tree planting strategy to planting more mature trees, planting more into streets, careful species selection, and effort into ongoing care. To plant 2,000 trees a year as needed by this motion would prevent all this being feasible, with infant whips needed in parkland.

Therefore, the Notice of Motion (as amended) was noted, and Cabinet agreed the recommendation that the proposals in the Notice of Motion would not be taken forward in full but an alternative found to meet the essence of the motion.

Instead, we have more started a new scheme to plant 12 special 'specimen' trees each year near a playground, with local children involved, to commentate births of that year. It was a delight to plant the first set in Bonchurch Park recently with West Leigh Primary pupils.

More broadly, in the 2024/25 planting season we have significantly increased tree planting though, with over 200 new street trees and 150 trees in parks that are mature saplings, and approximately 1000 whips.

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

Question

The Council is still working to the old Local Plan and so many opportunities are being missed like a full requirement for electric charging of vehicles and a watertight bungalow policy and many more.

Could the Portfolio Holder advise Council of the current position and when the Council will go out to consultation?

Answer

In accordance with the expectations of national Government, Southend-on-Sea City Council has an up-to-date Local Development Scheme (LDS) published on its website. This document sets out a timetable for preparing the new Southend-on-Sea Local Plan.

The next stage of Local Plan preparation, consultation on a 'Preferred Approach' document, is currently envisaged for June 2025. We expect to submit the new Local Plan to the Secretary of State in December 2026 for Examination in Public.

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

Question

I have asked before but have never had a clear answer, What is the administration's position on fitting sprinklers in our tower blocks?

Answer

The Council's position regarding fire safety in its housing stock is to ensure that these are, at the very least, compliant with all relevant fire and building safety regulation stipulated by both the Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act. This approach is not the subject of a discrete policy but is, rather, governed by the requirements for regulatory compliance. The Council, in partnership with the South Essex Homes and Essex Fire & Rescue Service, also oversees the fire safety of homes through ongoing governance mechanisms including a Fire Safety Monitoring group and a Joint Fire Safety Group.

All 15 of our high-rise residential buildings are currently going through the process of being registered with the Building Safety Regulator. These properties are subject to 6-monthly Fire Risk Assessments and the "Gerda" doors are regularly inspected to ensure installation integrity is in place. Further fire safety improvements including ventilation works are planned following registration with the Building Safety Regulator.

As Councillors will be aware, there have been pilots of both annunciation and fire suppression sprinklers in two high-rise residential blocks. These interventions are currently being evaluated and the option of potentially expanding these pilots is currently being analysed whilst also taking into account the many demands on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

12. Question from Councillor Cox to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Can I ask the Leader of the Council if he requested additional policy support from Officers?

Answer

Council policy teams are vital to understanding and interpreting national and regional policy, working with, and helping to brief a range of senior leaders and councillors on major issues. In addition to an assertive policy agenda from the new government, devolution, and Local Government Reorganisation, Southend-on-Sea City Council has an ambitious Corporate Plan and the support now in place reflects what is needed to deliver on this.

13. Question from Councillor Cox to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Can I ask the Leader of the Council if he believes that the Policy Team were sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of the Council?

Answer

The current Policy Team is resourced to meet the needs of the Council.

14. Question from Councillor Cartey to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Could the Portfolio Holder please confirm what percentage brightness streetlights are set at across the City, and whether there are any variations in brightness in key areas?

Answer

Streetlights are on the same illumination programme they have been on for the last few years, save for areas where requests have been made to adjust them. If Cllr Cartey has areas of concern or where his residents would like adjustments made, we will, of course, look into them.

15. Question from Councillor Cartey to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and SEND (Cllr Burton)

Question

Could the Portfolio Holder please confirm the process by which catchment areas for Southend's grammar schools are decided and reviewed?

Answer

Southend Grammar schools do not have catchment areas. Admission is based entirely on academic ability. Admission case law in 1989 determined that pupils applying for grammar schools should not be discriminated against simply because they reside outside the local authority area in which the school is situated. As such Southend Grammar schools cannot have arrangements that prioritise Southend residents over all other areas.

They do however determine admission by areas of priority which are laid out within their admission arrangements. All Southend grammar schools give preference to pupils, who pass the 11+, living within a defined geographical area that includes all addresses with a postcode of SS0 to SS9. This area was deemed a reasonable distance for pupils to travel. Each school then identifies what amount fall within each area of priority.

All Southend Grammar schools are their own admission authority. This means the Governing Body (or Academy Trust) for the school, determine their admission arrangements on an annual basis which includes the school's priority areas of admission. Admission arrangements must be consulted on if changes are proposed for the following year of main admission (year 7). Where admission

arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult.

However, admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years and this includes the priority areas set out within the arrangements.

16. Question from Councillor Dear to the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

As part of the Councils Budget 2025/26 £75k was allocated for improvements to Belfairs Park.

Could the Portfolio Holder please advise what is on the agenda to improve the park during the coming year?

Answer

A range of improvements are being planned and considered for Belfairs Park including work to repair the section of playground near the Woodland Centre so that can be reopened and consideration of future options for the former tennis courts.

Officers are improving and updating signage across the park, including informative boards in nature in conjunction with Essex Wildlife Trust, and ward councillors will be included in this work as it develops. All the existing signage has been reviewed and the results of this are being collated to inform the next steps of the discussion.

Discussions are underway with a contractor to improve the digital connectivity of several buildings in the Park, including the golf starter hut to enable the payment and booking systems to be updated and improved golf course marketing is being looked at.

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

Question

It is very clear that Southend city Council is intent on closing its only golf course, Belfairs golf course, situated in Belfairs Park, that next year will be 100 years old.

May I request a date on its final days of use?

Answer

The council is not closing the golf course.

18. Question from Councillor Courtenay to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cowan)

Question

Could the portfolio holder please confirm that the active enforcement hours for the restrictions on Beach Avenue in Chalkwell Ward will remain as 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday, until further notice?

Answer

Yes.