

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Questions – Council 22nd October 2015

Question 1 from Councillor Ayles to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport

Question

An injunction was brought in to prevent cruising in Southend at a substantial cost in money and time of officers and requiring redirection of police force personnel to enforce.

As well as seriously affecting the tourism economy of the town, was this action taken to reduce traffic injuries?

Answer

The issue of cruising was brought to the attention of the Council following a large unauthorised event in August 2015 in which huge numbers congregated along Western Esplanade. The behaviour displayed included inconsiderate parking, dangerous driving, and static burning of tyres etc. where members of the public were visiting Southend. There was an obvious risk of safety to visitors and residents including traffic injuries.

We are not aware of any negative impact to the town's tourism business by the injunction. Unauthorised events involving cars racing on the highway did spark complaints from our tourism businesses. We welcome motor vehicle events that have been properly arranged and authorised.

Question 2 from Councillor Ayles to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport

Question

At a previous Council meeting the Cabinet Holder for highways was questioned on why the bridge at Kent Elms junction was to be removed. The response was that it was not DDA compliant. When asked why, the reply was an officer said so.

Could the portfolio holder confirm why the bridge is not DDA compliant and therefore needs to be removed, thus giving a clear mandate to proceed and confidence to the Councillors and residents around the A127?

Answer

The bridge is not compliant with the current DDA standard, however that is not the reason it is being removed; it is being removed to accommodate the additional carriageway widening necessary to ensure the enhanced performance of the junction.

The bridge is not DDA compliant because of the presence of steps and the omission of a ramp. To ensure that the footbridge was able to conform to current standards significant improvements would be required to ensure its compliance and this would result in ramp lengths of approximately 116m in length.

There is insufficient space within the highway boundary to accommodate ramps of such lengths along pedestrian desire lines.

Question 1 from Councillor Cox to the Leader of the Council

Question

On the 2nd September, a press release was issued by the Council informing that the Leader of the Council was meeting Community Groups to discuss the future direction of the Council. Can I ask the Leader why there was only one public meeting as part of his plan to 'engage with large numbers of the community'?

Answer

There have been more than one meeting and there are more planned.

Question 2 from Councillor Cox to the Leader of the Council

Question

Could the Leader of the Council confirm that treating members of this Council like 'Mushrooms' violate the Local Code of Governance that has just recently been passed by Cabinet?

Answer

At Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee, I was asked a question about the need to notify ward councillors when advertisements are placed for the proposed disposal of open space. I am quite happy to incorporate such a reference in the relevant Appendix of the Corporate Asset Management Strategy as recommended in the pre-Cabinet Scrutiny process. In fact with this addition and the other proposals for introducing site notices and advertising on the Council's website, we are going significantly beyond the statutory requirements. This is all consistent with this Administration's philosophy of openness, transparency and meaningful consultation before taking decisions.

When your colleague referred to treating Members like 'mushrooms in the dark' I thought she was quoting the Conservative group's policy and I am surprised by your reaction to the light-hearted comment I made in response.

Question 1 from Councillor Courtenay to the Leader of the Council

Could the Executive Councillor provide the Council with an update on the implementation of the Leader's commitment announced during his budget speech, in February 2015, to provide every resident with an Advantage Card and assuming the delivery of these cards is not imminent, at what point will this commitment be fulfilled?

Answer

It is the aspiration of this Administration to provide every resident with an 'Advantage Card', however achieving this needs to be considered alongside the other Council priorities at this time of severe Conservative government funding cuts.

The Council is currently working with its new leisure provider Fusion Lifestyle to roll out the Advantage Card in pilot areas within Southend on Sea.

Fusion Lifestyle will be presenting a proposal to the Council that will initially target areas within St Luke's Ward. The cost of issuing an Advantage Card to every resident in the borough has to be considered in terms of benefits and the savings that may be accrued in delivering health and wellbeing. This can only be ascertained by reviewing and monitoring the initial pilot scheme.

Following the outcome of pilot reviews this scheme may then be rolled out across the borough.

Question 2 from Councillor Courtenay to the Leader of the Council

I am delighted that the Leader of the Council listened to the outcry at the lack of public consultation into the Blenheim Park Pavilion proposals and withdrew/deferred the relevant Cabinet paper until such time that sufficient public consultation had taken place.

I would like to suggest to the portfolio holder that the way of undertaking the required public consultation is to hold a public meeting, something he refused to do at the last meeting of Full Council. So I ask again, will the portfolio holder provide me with the date and time of the Southend Council run/facilitated meeting I have called for, to inform the residents of Blenheim Park ward about the proposals? If you are unable to do so, please provide an update as to how the Administration is proposing to proceed, as residents of Blenheim Park are now in limbo.

Answer

The proposal from Catholic United Football Club to construct football changing and club house facilities will not proceed unless the support is gained from all three of the Blenheim Park Councillors and a report will be brought back to a future meeting of the Cabinet on the matter.

Question 1 from Councillor Assenheim to the Leader of the Council

Question

Can the Leader please confirm the amount of borrowings by this administration to borrowings of the previous Administration and how much financing this has currently saved?

Answer

In 2014/15 the previous administration were planning to borrow £30 million, this administration did not take out any borrowings in 2014/15 and financing costs were £1 million lower than budgeted. In 2015/16 the previous administration were planning to borrow £23 million, so far this year this administration has only financed invest to save schemes. The forecast outturn for financing costs in 2015/16 is approximately £1.5 million lower than the budget based on the previous administration's borrowing plans. Therefore, this administration is £53 million below the previous administration's planned borrowing levels and has so far saved £2.5 million on financing costs in the Council's revenue budget.

Question 2 from Councillor Assenheim to the Leader of the Council

Question

Given that all Members have mail boxes here at the Civic Centre is it now time to save money and cease the delivery courier service to Members homes and that they should be notified by email or phone to collect reports and documentation from their boxes, except in extreme circumstances?

Answer

As you know, the Council is addressing the move to modern ways of working by making use of new technology. On 22nd September 2015, the Cabinet received a report on this subject and details of the stages of the project.

Paragraph 4.6 of that report made it clear that there are no plans to cease the general production and distribution of hard copy of agendas and reports in the short term. Therefore we will still need to use the courier service to distribute papers to Members at certain times and the cost of this is generally less than using the post system.

Of course, offering the facility to collect papers at the Civic Centre is an even cheaper option and this will be investigated as part of the next stage of the project. However, there is nothing to stop any Member from picking up their committee papers from the officers instead of having these delivered.

Question from Councillor Flewitt to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning & Regulatory Services

Question

What was the result of the vote taken upon the Conservative members of the Housing Working Party motion to extend the South Essex Homes Limited licence for 10 years?

Answer

Questions were raised at the Housing Working Party meeting on the 16th September about why the proposal was to extend the management agreement with South Essex Homes for 3 years only. Accordingly, the Working Party recommended that a supplementary report should be prepared for Council on this issue. No formal motions were moved at the Working Party and the recommendations made by the Working Party to Cabinet were agreed without a vote.

Question 1 from Councillor Jonathan Garston to the Leader of the Council

Question

In reference to Planning Application 15/00418/AMDT, the Shelter at Western Esplanade, what progress has been taken to ensure that as promised at the Committee, “This structure will be on site for under a year”, that a more permanent solution will be installed which is less obtrusive to neighbours in this residential area and could the leader confirm if he feels the permanent solution agreed under application 15/00858/BC4 meets the objectives of Leas shelter development brief?

Answer

Planning Application 15/00418/ADMT was the application dealing with the temporary installation of a structure to house ventilation equipment on the roof or the premises for no more than 12 months. Condition 4 of the planning permission requires the structure to be removed and the roof made good within 12 months from 3 June 2015. The tenant is liaising with the relevant officers and the Council’s engineers in relation to the cliff works through its designers and engineers to ensure that this condition is met before June 2016.

The permanent solution which is to conceal the ventilation and extraction equipment beneath the ground to the rear of the premises is as sympathetic to the design of the premises and to the adjacent open space as is reasonably practical and has planning permission under reference 15/00858/BC4 and so yes, I am of the view that the solution meets the objectives of the shelter development brief.

Question 2 from Councillor Jonathan Garston to the Executive Councillor for Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning & Regulatory Services

Question

Please can I ask the portfolio holder when a plan for the Landscaping for the Cliffs project at Clifton Drive will be available?

Answer

The landscape plan will be part of a planning application being submitted in the near future.