

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Council Meeting – 28th February 2013

(1) Question from Councillor Mark Flewitt to the Executive Councillor for Children and Learning

Question

Following a controversial 2012 for the UK's GCSE results, can the Executive Councillor comment on the local GCSE results and do so in context to the national results and say whether the GCSE are "fit for purpose"?

Answer

I am delighted to say that Southend's GCSE results are 2.4% above the national average and that Southend is in the top 30% of local authorities delivering 5A*-C including English and Mathematics. We are 3.6% above the Eastern Region average of 58.2% and 2nd out of the 11 local authorities that are in the East of England and nearly 5% above our statistical neighbours.

The GCSE English results hit all pupils and Local Authorities but I am pleased to say that Southend was 0.6% above the national average and 1.6% above the east of England average for the achievement of a C grade or above.

We are holding our heads high on the academic stage too with Southend students outperforming schools nationally by 5.9% in obtaining an English Baccalaureate (EBacc) (GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, languages and humanities) and NOT to be confused with an EBC. From 2014 schools and pupils will also be judged on whether they have obtained the EBacc - Southend schools are demonstrating that they are truly ready for the challenge of implementing a system that encourages more students to take these core subjects and to bring about greater fairness of opportunity so that all students have the chance to study for and obtain the EBacc.

Whilst GCSE's are the best qualifications for the vast majority of pupils to undertake we must accept that for some they are not, particularly with the move away from modular examinations. Southend is, however, proud of the fact that progress of pupils from their primary education to Key Stage 4 remains above National averages and East of England averages for the 4th year running in both English and Maths.

(2) Question from Councillor Mark Flewitt to the Executive Councillor for Children and Learning

Question

Can the Executive Councillor for Children Services briefly outline the proposed changes of the Children and Families Bill and give an assessment as to the likely impact upon those relevant services with Southend?

Answer

The proposed bill of over 150 pages is wide ranging and covers areas including arrangements for Looked After Children and adoption including recruitment assessment and post adoption support, additionally it covers the areas of special educational needs, provision health care and social care. I am satisfied that the strength of our existing services as identified through recent inspections puts this authority in a good place to be able to respond to the bill proposals which make good sense for the continued working with families and communities in partnership.

(3) Question from Councillor Anne Chalk to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing

Question

The Government has given more responsibility for Health to local councils. In view of that I would like to express my very real concerns about the following matter.

Lately there has been widespread public concern about the proposed changes that the Clinical Commissioning Group intend to impose on the Pathology services in Southend.

Unfortunately information about this matter was given to the Public before the Council was informed causing considerable consternation for many Members.

Would the Executive Councillor please assure fellow Members and myself that she will urge the Clinical Commissioning Board, in future, to brief the Council about any major proposed changes to any part of the Health Service in advance of them informing the public and so avoid this kind of situation arising again.

Answer

As the Councillor is aware from the recent discussion at Community Services Scrutiny meeting this proposal was in fact initiated two years ago by the then Regional Health authority. I agree that it would have been much more helpful if the Health Authority has ensured there was full consultation on the significant changes before the plans were so far advanced. Following the recent discussions with the Clinical Commissioning Group I can assure Councillor Chalk that the Clinical Commissioning Group is fully aware of the Councils' expectation that they will consult us on any major changes they propose to make. In addition, through the Health and Wellbeing Board and through the Health Overview Scrutiny Committee, the Council will continue to scrutinise any major changes in local health services. I am confident that when the CCG fully takes up its responsibilities from April 2013 they will want to work closely with the Council to avoid such situations arising again.

(4) Question from Councillor Stephen Aylen to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport

Question

Following new funding for the Prittle Brooke cycle path and the possibility of approx a thousand trees to be removed in Belfairs Park, would the Executive Councillor responsible agree that the cycle path section through Belfairs Park and the decisions of 15th July/22nd August and 23rd September 2005 Biodiversity Working Party should be re-assessed.

Answer

There are no plans to remove any trees in Belfairs Park in respect of Prittle Brook greenway. The funding to complete the improvement of the route from Priory Park to the Woodlands Visitor Centre has been awarded as a grant solely for this purpose from the Department for Transport Communities Funding (2013-14) with a contribution from the Council's Local Transport Plan.

There are no proposals and no funding to take forward any other routes in Belfairs. There are, therefore, no proposals to re-assess decisions made at the Working Party in 2005.

(5) Question from Councillor Stephen Aylen to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport

Question

Following new funding for the Prittle Brooke cycle path and the possibility of its affect on the main clean water supply to Southend, would the Executive Councillor responsible state the water companies statutory obligations with regards to the leaky pipe and securing the clean water supply for Southend Borough.

This is requested as there is concern as to the situation with regards safe clean water supply and health in the event of failure for the residents of Southend.

Answer

This is a matter for discussion with the Water Company. I am not aware of any implication on the water main for the proposed improvements to the route to the Visitor Centre.

(6) Question from Councillor Mike Assenheim to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport

Question

It is understood that the Council is going to lose the Domestic Abuse Partnership Manager and other Officers in that Department owing to cut backs.

Given that Essex Police recorded 4,233 incidents of domestic abuse in Southend for 2011/12, being an increase of 12% on the previous year.

Given that 88% of Essex incidents of domestic violence occurred whilst children were present and given that the repeat incident rate rose by 4% to 53%

Will the Executive Councillor with responsibility, please state, how the Council will continue continuity within the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership within the Borough if we lose these Officers.

Answer

Southend's Domestic Abuse Strategy Group was established to provide the strategic direction on domestic abuse and is chaired by a senior manager within the Council's Public Health team. The Group has successfully co-ordinated and driven the agenda locally over the past four years and the Council would envisage that this work will continue, should this post be removed.

A number of the critical partner agencies (i.e. Police; Probation; Public health; Housing; Children's Services etc) are already represented on the Group. The accountability and governance of the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group will continue to remain with Southend's Community Safety Partnership Board-a statutory body responsible for addressing crime and disorder locally.