

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Council Meeting: 17th July 2014

Question from Councillor Stephen Ayles to the Portfolio Holder for Culture & Tourism:

As many believe I have an interest in local history, I have been contacted by a number of Historians who are researching various aspects of Southend's past. I am being told that important items, documents, etc. are missing from the museum and library, that were known to exist.

I can confirm that most of the records with regard the Ekco shelters have disappeared from the museum and Original type maps from the library.

May I ask the portfolio holder if it could be investigated how much has gone missing and how it could be stopped?

Answer

We are not aware of any specific items that are missing and would welcome information on any thought to be missing.

The Council fully understands its role as custodian of Southend's history and over the past few years has made as much of its local history collection available to the public as possible.

Ensuring the protection of the records means storing them in the best possible conditions and to this end the Tithe Map for Southend was transferred several years ago to the Essex Record Office whose modern archival store is the best place to preserve this important document. Copies are available at the Forum.

The records for the EKCO air-raid shelters are available at the Central Museum on application.

Question from Councillor Anne Chalk to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport:

Recently the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, condemned the use of CCTV vehicles as 'cash cows', by some local authorities and stated they should only be used to patrol outside schools and in bus lanes. In addition the traffic penalty adjudicator, James Richardson at an appeal case in April 2012 ruled that their use in our borough was out of line with the recommendations of The Traffic Management Act 2004.

Would the portfolio holder therefore, review the use of the CCTV cars, and consider if necessary, taking steps to withdraw these vehicles, instead employing CEOs to do the job?

Answer

As Cllr Chalk rightly says, the Government is currently reviewing the use of CCTV cars for parking enforcement. The review is currently going through the parliamentary processes and is expected to be concluded later this year. Whilst there are lots of speculations in the media about the Government's intentions to limit the use of CCTV enforcement, it is expected that this will continue around schools, bus stops, bus lanes and pedestrian crossings. The Council will keep an eye on these developments and consider implications of the government proposals once finally known and comply with the legal requirements accordingly. The Council respects the decisions of the Adjudication Service and considers their recommendations and has been reviewing our policies and procedures to improve compliance.

The CCTV policy was reviewed after 12 months of its operation, a year earlier than initially intended. The Cabinet in January 2013 agreed the revised policy which reflected adjudication views.

Question from Councillor Courtenay to the Executive Councillor for Children & Learning

I was disappointed that the first I heard about the closure of St Hilda's was from a local weekly newspaper on 10th July 2014. Could the Executive Councillor for Children and Learning please inform me when she and her officers were first aware of the closure and provide some detail as to what support the council is giving to pupils and their parents at this difficult time?

Answer

Unfortunately the council were first made aware of the closure on Thursday and the school had given us no prior notice or opportunity to talk to parents or offer support. Since then we have tried to contact the school with no success. We have reviewed our own records to ensure there are no vulnerable children needing assistance and have issued a press statement that any Southend parent not able to make their own arrangements for September to contact our admissions team and we will do our best to provide a suitable placement.

I share the councillors disappointment on how this difficult situation has been handled by the school but would stress the task now is to support those parents in obtaining a good education for their child.

Question from Councillor Courtenay to the Executive Councillor for the Leader of the Council

Will the Leader of the Council be doing the honourable thing and falling on his sword, as a governor of the Federation of Greenways Schools, over the recent Ofsted comments "Governors have not challenged school leaders rigorously enough to help improve the school more quickly," published in the latest junior school inspection?"

Answer

No, Falling on ones swords doesn't achieve anything. As Councillor Courtney perfectly knows "Governors bring many and varying strengths to their work with the school" and as a relatively new constituted governor body we are reassured that the actions being taken by the school's leadership team to improve the school are the correct ones and this has been acknowledge by the Inspection Team.

Question from Councillor Mark Flewitt to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection, Waste and Transport:

Will the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport agree with me in holding a Borough wide consultation as to highway matters and transport, so as to best direct our actions in these matters?

Answer

The Council has a number of highways projects being currently developed and the approach to such projects is to hold a consultation related to that particular project to ensure that those affected, or who may have an interest are consulted. Additionally all capital works are reported publicly through the Council's normal reporting mechanisms. Where projects are the subject of planning applications these will be subject to the publicity requirements as set out in planning legislation.

The Council has also recently undertaken a comprehensive consultation survey of the carriageways and footways around the Borough, which will be used to inform highway maintenance priorities.

Question from Councillor Mark Flewitt to Executive Councillor for Regulatory Control:

Will the Executive Councillor for Regulatory Control say that he is confident with the level of understanding among the public as to technical reports accompanying large planning applications?

Answer

Large applications are often accompanied by technical reports on a range of topics and the Council's professional staff assesses those reports and provide advice based on that assessment, this in turn is incorporated into the reports that go to the Council's Development Control Committee. This also includes any responses or input from the public.

Question from Councillor Jonathan Garston to the Executive Councillor for Culture:

Could the Portfolio holder give the council an update on the Cliff Slippage area at the bottom of Clifton Drive and an idea as to when repair work will begin opening up this important open space for residents and visitors?

Answer

I am aware that it has been necessary to close some of the parks paths and steps due to concerns about ground movement in the Cliffs Gardens below Clifton Drive - although I am not aware of any recent major movement since the change of administration.

The area in question is being surveyed and that work is ongoing with regular monitoring taking place to ensure public safety. Following the recent investigations, work has been undertaken to determine the best structural solution to ensure a permanent stabilization of the slope. This has now been concluded, and a detailed design solution is being developed.

It is hoped to commence work as soon as possible.

Question from Councillor Jonathan Garston to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport:

Could the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport tell me the reasons for the postponement of the last scheduled Traffic and Parking Working Party and give me the date for its next meeting?

Answer

I had asked for the postponement of the Traffic and Parking Working Party until September, because as a new Portfolio Holder, I wanted time to familiarise myself with all the issues the Working Party was likely to consider. The date of the next meeting is Thursday 18th September at 6:00pm.