

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Council Meeting – 11th December 2014

Question from Mr Webb to the Leader of the Council

Question

How can the council show the residents of Southend that their Council Tax is spent wisely compared to the previous Conservative run council who spent money on schemes such as £55,000 on mobile phones to officers, £390,000 on a light up sculpture and a £5,000 on a millennium clock that was not weather proof?

Answer

Firstly, I would like to thank Mr Webb for this question. In respect of this year's budget the joint administration are continuing with the budget that was approved by the previous administration. I can confirm that this budget is on target to be delivered by the end of this financial year. However, the joint administration has also identified a number of new corporate priorities and has agreed to a number of reviews of previous budget decisions, such as the library review and Delaware and Priory.

The joint administration is in the process of preparing the budget for 2015/16 which will be presented to Council in February next year.

With regard to the specific issue associated with mobile phones the Council has reviewed the costs of mobile phones and the actual figure for the financial year 2013/14 was £136k. This of course is not for Mobile Phones alone, but also for voice and data transmission and the provision of 3G dongles. These tools allow council staff to operate remotely and they're use is a key to the council's modernisation strategy. It increases productivity and releases space within the Civic Centre which in turn creates revenue.

Because of Mr Webb's question, officers will undergo a full review to ensure appropriate allocation of phones to officers.

Second question from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health & Housing

Question

SEAL was introduced to maintain landlords and agencies. How is the scheme going and what is the next step in the scheme to ensure both tenants and landlords are treated fairly and equally?

Answer

The Council has been supporting the South East Alliance of Landlords, Agents and Residents (SEAL) in raising standards of management and property condition and in the reduction of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). This is ongoing through the implementation of SEAL response and complaint procedures, the holding of forums, and through education and assistance. SEAL completed a Street Blitz engaging local residents and landlords/agents in Central areas to tidy up street frontages in June/July of this year. This is leading to the formulation of community action groups. SEAL will also be tasked with improving the refuse situation for privately rented properties.

The next steps for SEAL, will be to continue working on the original 3 Aims listed initially, but also focusing on Residents' requirements:-

- SEAL plan to be self- funding through a Volunteer Business Development Officer;
- Provide regular training for Members and Residents managed by that BDO;
- Continue to achieve funding for Community Action, and start and support new groups;
- Launch the Community website to inform, connect and encourage active residents and landlords.

SEAL seeks to continue to grow membership and educate Landlords, as well as continue to work with tenants to educate them on how to conduct their tenancies successfully, thus reducing evictions. A Steering Group will continue to look for common sense ways to operate more effectively to achieve the 4 aims, reducing ASB, improving property condition and the street scene, and in addition, supporting residents through the street groups, to achieve and sustain improvement.

The Council welcomes these developments and has resolved to continue to work closely with SEAL to ensure that tenants and landlords are treated fairly and equally.