

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Council Meeting – 11th December 2014

Question from Councillor Ayles to the Executive Councillor for Enterprise, Tourism and Economic Development

Question

Will the cabinet holder for leisure publicly assure all those residents of Southend and members of Belfairs and Southend golf clubs that there is no intention to close the Harry Colt, Belfairs golf course?

Answer

The Council has no intention to close Belfairs Golf Course. The course makes a significant contribution to the sport and recreation offer in the town. The Council has recognised this by continuing to invest in the course; installing new drainage, replacing the irrigation system, carrying out annual improvements to tees and bunkers, work on the fairways and the continuing programme of maintenance.

Question from Councillor Davies to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health & Housing

Question

The recent government cuts in social funding now mean there is a lot more pressure on charity groups and foodbanks to provide assistance to the homeless in Southend.

Does the Portfolio Holder think this is acceptable?

Answer

The rapid rise in the demand for food banks is rightly a matter of growing public concern. The report this week of the All Party Parliamentary Group, "Feeding Britain", highlights the fact that a key reason for the growth in demand is "changes or delays to Benefits". This is affecting many people in our society, not just the homeless. This is clearly unacceptable.

The Council has sought to give practical support to groups working in the Borough to aid the homeless. The largest local food bank operates from a community centre owned by the Council.

In addition, despite financial challenges over the last few years, we continue to work alongside church groups to provide winter night shelters across the borough. This project exceeds best practice, providing meals, companionship and a safe place to sleep for vulnerable people for 4 months of the year.

Southend Borough Council's Community Housing Team are closely involved in the planning of this operation each year, as well as funding the co-ordinator who oversees it. The Private Sector Housing Team administer funds to provide sleeping bags, rollmats and other items, while public health provide free training to the volunteers.

We are the lead authority responsible for a sub regional project that has commissioned outreach and reconnection workers across South Essex. This work, which has been directly mentioned by the Housing Minister, has already resulted in several night patrols of Southend, advising homeless people of the services available to them, and working to reconnect them where possible.

We are currently working to implement a multi-agency workgroup that will focus on those people in our society with multiple complex needs.

We are committed to ensuring the most vulnerable members of our society receive the assistance they need, and are proud to work in close partnership with local organisations to achieve this.

Question from Councillor Davies to the Executive Councillor for Community Development

Question

Can the Portfolio Holder inform me what the impact of EU immigration (in particular those claiming benefit) has been on Council services?

Answer

There is limited statistical information on which to base the answer as data on EU immigration status is collected by few Council services. However the 2011 Census identified that 3.1% of Southend's population were born in EU countries outside the UK and of this group the number of unemployed was 281.

EU migrants pay taxes in host countries and under EU law are entitled to the same benefits and services as citizens of the host country. While EU migrants to the UK can stay for 3 months, to stay longer they have to be in work, actively seeking work with a genuine chance of being hired, or

be able to show they have enough money not to be a burden on public services.

There is no direct impact to the Council for payment of Housing Benefit, as costs are covered by the Government. The Government also contributes to the cost of our Council Tax Reduction Scheme with any shortfall passed onto working age claimants.

Applicants for general needs Council housing in Southend are very unlikely to be housed unless they have a local connection. Applicants must demonstrate that they fall into one of the following categories:

- they have lived in the Borough for at least 3 of the last 5 years;
- they have worked or volunteered in the Borough for at least 12 months;
- they have immediate family who have lived in the Borough for the last 5 years;
- they are a member or recent member of the Armed Forces or have a medical need from being a reservist;
- they are statutory homeless; or
- there are exceptional circumstances.

In addition, by law, an allocation of social housing cannot be made to anybody who is subject to immigration control e.g. asylum seekers and those who do not have the right to remain.

The Council will only provide services to those who are entitled to receive them and will, therefore, treat people in accordance to their needs and legal entitlement.

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

Question

I was pleased to see a very large turnout for the Remembrance Sunday event at the Cenotaph on Clifton Parade this year. It is good to see the ever increasing numbers attending the events to pay their respects to those who have given so much for us to be able to enjoy what we have today. I was, however, disappointed to see a number of cars in and around the Prittlewell square area that had received parking tickets on that morning. I was unable to see the reasons why they had received tickets but with the large amount of people wanting to attend the Service parking was at a Premium. There was a large amount of elderly at the event and these residents would need to be as close to the Cenotaph as possible.

Would it be possible to make future Remembrance Sundays free to park to allow as many people as possible to show their respect and to not have the event sullied by over zealous enforcement officers?

Answer

I agree with Councillor Burling that Remembrance Sunday events are important and we are pleased with the level of attendance. As you are aware, there are generally three Remembrance Parades in the borough, in Leigh, Shoebury and Central Southend. We work closely with local police in order to ensure we plan ahead and provide safe areas for the parade and where necessary, prohibit parking through special restrictions for both access and security in the area.

Despite very prominent signage advising motorists that parking is not permitted (including blue badge holders) in certain areas, each year unfortunately enforcement is needed resulting in the issuing of Penalty Charge Notices to vehicles parking within the prohibited areas and a number of vehicles are also relocated to different roads on instruction from the Police. I am sure you would appreciate that this is for security reasons.

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

Question

Will the Portfolio Holder for Transport say that not only does he note the will of the cross party members who attended the Place Scrutiny (Abellio Special) as to joining in a cross party campaign to respond to the consultation from government as to funding for the Southend Victoria to Liverpool Street (And other destinations) line but that he will also undertake to bring forward an urgent report to Cabinet, very early in January 2015 to formalise this position?

Answer

I note the will of the cross party members and fully support the need to make the case for investment and improvement in services on the Liverpool Street line. It is important to note that Abellio were awarded an extension to their franchise, which only runs until October 2016. Therefore, in responding to this request, I must mention that the Department of Transport has this week launched a consultation on the East Anglia rail franchise with a closing date of 16th March 2015, which I consider to be the most appropriate way of presenting this Council's view. In terms of rail services for Southend, there is also a response required to the c2c consultation on timetable changes by 14th January

2015 and a Network Rail consultation on the Anglia Route Study, with a response required by 3rd February 2015.

Unfortunately, the Cabinet timetable will not allow these rail consultations to be taken to Cabinet, however, I recommend that final approval to the responses will be delegated to the Corporate Director for Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection, Waste and Transport. There is a Place Scrutiny Committee which meets on 26th January 2015 and views will feed into the responses for the East Anglia rail franchise and Anglia Route Study.

A separate meeting for Members has been arranged for the evening of 7th January 2015 to consider the c2c timetable changes and formulate a response by the due date.