

Public Document Pack

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Legal & Democratic Services

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lives better
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07 February 2022

Dear Councillor

**THE COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 15TH JULY, 2021
SUPPLEMENTARY PACK 2: QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC / COUNCILLORS AND
APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES**

Please find enclosed, for consideration at the next meeting of the The Council taking place on Thursday, 15th July, 2021, the following items that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No Item

3 Questions from Members of the Public (Pages 1 - 8)

Questions/Answers sheet attached

4 Questions from Members of the Council (Pages 9 - 14)

Questions/Answers sheet attached

41 Appointments to Committees, etc (Pages 15 - 16)

List of Appointments attached

Robert Harris
Principal Democratic Services Officer

Council – 15th July 2021

Public Questions

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Question 1 from Mr David Webb to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Culture, Tourism and Planning

Question

Many residents in Westborough are concerned with the level of the cleanliness of their streets. What can residents do if they are concerned with their level of cleanliness and what penalty do Veolia occur if they fall below the set standard?

Answer

The Council encourages residents to report cleaning issues through MySouthend (the Council's online reporting tool). The streets in Westborough Ward are swept approximately every 6 weeks with regular checks between cleansing cycles to ensure standards are maintained. The Council also supports community groups carrying out litter-picking and this is encouraged. For more information about this please see the Council's website www.southernd.gov.uk or contact Veolia at uk.southend-recycling@veolia.com or by calling 0203 567 6955.

We have noticed in recent times a particular problem in certain streets and have responded to reports of large quantities being dumped. Where evidence can be found of the perpetrators, we will take appropriate action.

The Council Client Management Team monitors Veolia's performance through collecting data and carrying out inspections. Financial deductions may apply if certain cleanliness targets are not met.

Question 2 from Mr David Webb to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Asset Management and Inward Investment (

Question

What is the criteria for cracked pavements or pavements which are rocking up and down to get repaired, as in Westborough I have reported many that they say are not required to be repaired?

Answer

If a footway safety issue is reported, then inspected, and the Highways Inspector has detailed that no current repair is required on a footway, then it has not met our current intervention levels. For a footway, there must be a significant level difference of >20mm to be recorded as a repairable defect. Cracked footways, while not aesthetically pleasing, do not necessarily represent a safety issue unless they have significant crack width (again >20mm). If defects cover a significant area of the whole footway, then it would be considered as part of our ongoing highways improvement programme and would be prioritised according to risk/condition.

The quickest way for an inspection to be undertaken is to raise it via the MySouthend App. This App goes directly to the inspectors, and we inspect the site within 24hrs or next working day. All reports are assessed to determine whether they meet the criteria for an immediate repair or forwarded to the relevant Statutory Undertaker/Utility company responsible for the maintenance repair or replacement of the apparatus or site. Where urgent safety defects are found and they are the Council's responsibility, repairs are scheduled and undertaken within 2 hours or up to 7 days depending on the severity and arrangement of appropriate traffic management. All other damage/defects will be scheduled and prioritised as part of our routine general maintenance programme.

Question 3 from Mr Jonathan Garston to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Asset Management and Inward Investment

Question

It has been brought to my attention that at peak times the traffic situation in Priory Crescent at the Ecko site becomes very congested due to the new developments.

Has the Portfolio holder been made aware of this and are officers investigating a solution as the right turn into Aldi coming from the East causes tailbacks?

Answer

As part of the planning permission, ALDI provided a detailed transport assessment including up-to-date traffic surveys and TRICS traffic modelling. The TRICS traffic modelling also provided future traffic growth predictions until 2023. It is considered that this was a robust assessment in line with national traffic modelling standards. The current traffic levels do not exceed the modelling predictions with no additional works currently planned at these development sites.

It should be noted that a Travel Plan was also submitted as part of the planning application which will be monitored by highway officers to ensure traffic levels remain acceptable.

There have been no notable levels of communication/complaints concerning these sites.

Question 4 from Mr Jonathan Garston to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Asset Management and Inward Investment (

Question

Please can I have an up-to-date timescale with regards to the installation of speed cameras along Eastern Avenue. For Residents safety I do ask for this to be given a high priority?

Answer

The service was requested to look into the possibility of speed cameras at this location last year; and has subsequently engaged with a third party to present to us options for implementation of cameras. The service is currently undertaking a feasibility study of the top 9 identified sites that require some form of speed reduction put in place; these 9 schemes have an estimate value of £2.9m with this particular estimated to be in the region of £200-250k.

Due to the number of speed reduction schemes being requested a report is being presented to Cabinet on the 2 November to outline a criteria, and longer term strategy for the introduction of any speed reduction schemes which will include cameras. This will ensure that any scheme introduced will be the right scheme for the right location that will support the individual area objectives.

Once a policy is in place, the service will be able to assess the priority of this scheme and advise accordingly.

Question 5 from Mr Majzoub Ali to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care and Health Integration

Question

The Healthwatch Southend (HWS) Advisory Board Group resigned en-masse in January 2021 and has not been replaced.

Family Action and the NHS Alliance Director state that the functions of Healthwatch Southend have not been affected. Does this mean there is no real need for a HWS Advisory Board?

Answer

Healthwatch was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to be the new consumer champion for health and social care in England. Its purpose is to strengthen the collective voice of patients and users of health and social care services and of the general public.

In order to function as a Healthwatch is a requirement that lay people and volunteers are included in decision-making and involved the work of Healthwatch. As Southend Healthwatch operates a hosted model this means an advisory group is required.

When the previous advisory group resigned, Southend Borough Council asked Family Action (as the host charity) to recruit a new advisory group.

Question 6 from Mr Majzoub Ali to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care and Health Integration

Question

Family Action is now actively trying to recruit a new advisory board without telling potential volunteers the reasons why the previous group had stepped down.

This cannot be acceptable as it's against openness and transparency, can it?

Answer

We have an expectation of openness and transparency from all of the organisations we work with, and this is even more important in the case of Healthwatch, which has a responsibility for championing the voice of local people.

The enquirer has submitted a separate question to Southend Borough Council (commissioning), along the same lines and received a response on 25 June 2021. This response noted the concern and indicated that an investigation into the concerns would take place. This has concluded and a response has been supplied to the enquirer.

Question 7 from Ms Terri Simpson to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Culture, Tourism and Planning

Question

Could Southend Council please consider an outdoor skate 'rink' in the town?

We have several skateparks in or around Southend but they are predominantly ramps and bowls for skaters, bikes and scooters to do stunts.

Since the start of the covid lockdown a few of us skate friends set up a facebook group called Southend Fossil Skaters to communicate and get out on our skates for exercise. What started off as 10-12 friends in this group it has now grown to (at today's count) 353 members. We currently use the seafront, local car parks or tennis courts for skating but this is not practical, not always safe and slightly irritating to residents or pedestrians (if they live close by) or users of these facilities. Although we are all regular members of our local indoor rink Rollacity, there is an absolute need for a daytime, outdoor rink as there are many beginner skaters who need a flat safe surface in which to practice. As a group we have had many discussions on how we can go about getting a rink in our town. We hope you will consider this.

Answer

Thank you for your question Ms Simpson. The growth of participation reported by your group in this sport is impressive. Space for this type of activity usually comes with a compromise given space constraints in the

Borough and not something that we can immediately see a solution for. May I suggest you provide some indications of where you had thought this might be achievable based on the discussions you refer to and contact me with those suggestions.

Question 8 from Ms Kimberly O’Connell to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Culture, Tourism and Planning

Question

I am very concerned that the Council is being left with no alternative than to go to consultation with regards to building on green belt land.

I understand that this is due to the unreasonable quota of new housing that needs to be delivered in Southend as demanded by the Government.

I have been running a petition against these proposals and would ask if the petition, which has already amassed over a 1000 signatures could or would be used as part of this consultation?

Answer

The Council will accept submission of the Petition as part of the consultation response. It is noted, however, that this is being put forward prior to the consultation and without respondents having access to all the relevant documentation that will be published.

The amount of new homes that Local Authorities have to provide for in their Local Plans is set out by Government. The figure for Southend is 1,181 per annum or 23,620 over a 20 year period.

National planning policy and guidance requires the Council to go through a range of processes in producing a Local Plan. This includes prioritising non-green belt sites in the first instance and, if housing needs cannot be met, only then should sites within the Green Belt be considered. Detailed studies have been undertaken on the potential supply of new homes in Southend and following this there is a deficit of around 10,000 new homes when only non-green belt sites are included. Government guidance and the Planning Inspector would require us as a Local Planning Authority to look at and consider sites being promoted in the Green Belt in such circumstances.

The Local Plan consultation is only the second of five stages of preparing a statutory Local Plan for Southend and sets out possible options for consideration. Following feedback from the public consultation, further consultations will take place before the Plan is submitted for an independent examination. The Local Plan can be rejected by central Government as “unsound” if we do not consider the full range of options and sites being submitted to us for development at this stage, including those within the Green Belt. For this reason, Green Belt sites should be included as potential sites within the Refining the Options document and be subject to consultation even if they are discounted in the final version of the plan.

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Council – 15th July 2021

Councillor Questions

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Question 1 from Cllr Nelson to the Leader of the Council

Question

The Council recently purchased the Victorias shopping centre. Can the portfolio holder provide an update of the shopping centres financial situation and what the effect of COVID has been on these?

Answer

The Council acquired the shopping centre during the pandemic so only has pre-pandemic trading figures from the previous landlord to compare. Several essential retailers have remained open throughout, while others have been forced to close under Government guidance. All businesses have been signposted to the relevant grant schemes.

The annual contracted rent is now 2% higher than it was when the Council completed the purchase in December 2020 following the agreement of a number of new tenancies.

The rent and service charge collection rates vary each month. These are lower during the pandemic than pre-pandemic figures although this situation is improving as restrictions are lifted.

Question 2 from Cllr Nelson to the Leader of the Council

Question

How many units in the Victorias shopping centre are occupied by businesses, how many of these remained open throughout the COVID pandemic due to being essential retail?

Answer

Currently, 51 units are occupied of a total of 82 units, therefore occupancy is at 62%. 7 businesses traded through the pandemic as essential retailers, a further 5 offered click and collect only.

Question 3 from Cllr Garston to the Leader of the Council

Question

Whilst there has been Administration and Public support for the retention and re-opening of the Kursaal, it looks so empty and a lost opportunity as we head into the summer season. Can I ask, what progress and what initiatives the Administration are undertaking to return this wonderful and popular asset to Southend?

Answer

Subject to further work, the potential for the Kursaal to feature in the second round Levelling Up Fund bid was articulated in the Levelling Up Fund report agreed by Cabinet on 15 June 2021.

The Council is in contact with Concrete Culture in relation to the engagement and feasibility work that they have been undertaking.

Officers maintain regular dialogue with the leaseholder and their agents. This continues to help security concerns to be addressed quickly, particularly in relation to the car park.

Issues of repair have been raised by the Council, particularly in relation to the heritage elements of the building and a survey is being commissioned so that the extent and cost of condition of these items is understood.

Question 4 from Cllr Garston to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Culture, Tourism and Planning

Question

The new pier trains, which was an initiative of the last Administration, are soon to installed on our pier. What is the Administration doing to enhance the offer at the end of the pier?

Answer

Thank you, Cllr Garston for this question. The pier trains are due to arrive later this month which will bring a welcome boost to the Pier's offer and, as you know, have been unanimously supported by all groups of the Council.

This year also sees the development of the Pier Head offer, with refurbishment works at the Pavilion shortly to open and a new performance and catering space to be constructed opposite the Pier Head train station. A new toilet block, with viewing platform situated on top of the building, will also be completed this year. These new venues, along with a programme of entertainment, provide more reasons for visitors to enjoy their experience and enable them to spend longer at the Pier Head.

As the Council's representative on the Pier Museum Trust, I can also say that extensive work is being done within the museum by way of revitalising displays, information, archiving and the whole look of the area. Although not at the Pier Head, we will eventually be welcoming one of the current pier train elements into the museum, which will then show the continuity through the last 100 years or so of getting people to the Pier Head. The Pier Museum is run by volunteers and relies on membership so I would invite all councillors to join the membership and so support the recording for posterity of the icon of Southend.

Question 5 from Councillor Cox to the Executive Councillor for Transport, Asset Management and Inward Investment

Question

Can I ask the Portfolio Holder if utility companies have a legal obligation to re-instate highways and footpaths back to its original condition using the same existing materials?

Answer

In line with the SROH (Specification for Reinstatement of Highways), the permanent re-instatement should be "like for like". Therefore, as the Highways Authority, this is what is expected from the utility companies;

however, there are occasions where this is sometimes not possible due to resourcing of materials and we work with utilities to reinstate in line with our policies. If the reinstatement does not accord with our policies, then the Council will engage with the utility company and request a suitable reinstatement be undertaken by the utility company. If this is not adhered to then we will undertake the works and look to recover these costs from the utility company.

However; previously the authority has permitted utilities to reinstate black bituminous macadam in red macadam footways in line with policy whereby when this road/location is due to be resurfaced it will be fully converted to a black flexible material. Red macadam is difficult to resource and expensive and therefore its use can prolong works duration affecting the highway network for an elongated period.

Question 6 from Councillor Cowdrey to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection

Question

On 11th April 2018, Southend Council were granted a five year injunction focused on car cruisers in the Borough. Some of the behaviours described within the injunction are also addressed in areas subject to a current PSPO, although driving related activity are not addressed.

Can the Portfolio holder for Public Protection please update us as to the impact of the injunction, how many have actually been served and whether there have been any prosecutions to date?

Answer

The impact of the injunction has been significant. Both police and Council media teams frequently publicise the injunction across various social media channels (including the actual car cruise facebook pages) and our own websites when we receive intelligence of a planned cruise. The cruise is then policed by the Council's community safety officers and police teams, with many drivers engaged with on site and given details about the conditions of the injunction.

This process and approach have significantly reduced behaviours we once saw (pre-2018) associated with car cruises – and to date, a full prosecution relating to a breach of injunction has not been required. However, police on many occasions have prosecuted drivers in relation

to other matters whilst attending a cruise (such as vehicle defects, no MOT, no insurance, no tax etc).

What we have seen in recent months and due to COVID easing, is unplanned or sudden cruises being organised and mass attendance that follows. This has caused police and community safety team concerns due to the lack of intelligence that they are happening, and equally, the sheer volume of numbers attending and overwhelming the resources we have to police the event.

As a result of this, police and community safety team have put in place new measures to try and deal better with the numbers attending, this includes highway closure (if required), additional police resource support, CCTV footage of behaviours, civil enforcement officer patrols, and recording of driver details in order to serve the injunction notice on them (which is the first step of the breach process). If having been served the notice, the driver then breaches again, they are then liable for prosecution. We have records of all those drivers who in recent months, have been served a notice by either police or community safety officers.

So far, this seems to have made an improvement on behaviours and has impacted on numbers attending that we saw back in May/June. However, due to lockdown easing, the sense of getting out and being on the seafront is appealing to many, so we anticipate that high numbers will continue to attend both planned and unplanned cruises or meet ups across the summer months.

Question 7 from Councillor Keith Evans to the Leader of the Council

Question

Does the Council have sufficient resources and staff to carry out its functions, including holding to account any outsourced services, in an acceptable timely manner?

Answer

Across all areas of the Council, managers are responsible for maintaining and managing services within the agreed budget and in line with their Business Continuity Plans and service performance measures.

The Corporate Management Team (CMT) regularly discusses resources with respect to demand and capacity. This strategic overview supports an organisation-wide response where needed. These discussions also happen at Departmental and service level where resources will be directed to the key priorities of the service and the Council at any point in time.

For example, the Council has operated a very successful staff redeployment policy in 2020/21, which has rapidly repositioned staff to critical areas of need. This has been in place to support demand during the waves of the Covid-19 pandemic.

External contracts are developed and monitored to ensure that outsourced service delivery is in line with Council policies and contracts can be challenged by the Council where the services being offered fall short of acceptable agreed standards.

Question 8 from Councillor Keith Evans to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Culture, Tourism and Planning

Question

During the pandemic, a significant amount of money was given to support Fusion. Is the expectation that this money will be repaid?

Answer

Fusion, like many in the leisure sector, were hit with lengthy closure and limited opportunities to reopen. Funding agreed by the Council and supported by Government allocations provided them with the ability to maintain essential staff and services to ensure the facilities were able to reopen. Payments made were in the form of grant and not for repayment.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS AND AMENDMENTS

COUNCIL MEETING - 15 JULY 2021

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**(1) JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROGRAMME WORKING PARTY
(PROJECT TEAM) 2021/22 (9)**

(Members of Place, People and Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committees only)
(Chair to be agreed at the first meeting)

Conservative Group (4)

Councillor B Beggs
Councillor K Buck
Councillor J Moyies
Councillor D Nelson

Labour Group (2)

To be notified to the Chief Executive

Independent Group (1)

Councillor I Shead

Liberal Democrat Group (1)

Councillor A Thompson

Non-Aligned (1)

Councillor K Evans

(2) FOSTERING PANEL

Councillor K Evans to replace Councillor H Boyd on the Fostering Panel, at request of Conservative Group.

(3) PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor K Evans to replace Councillor J Beck on the Place Scrutiny Committee.

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